

New review investigates the health benefit of contact with the natural environment

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Credit: Wikipedia.

A team of Cochrane authors based in the UK and led by an academic from Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, has carried out a review investigating the health benefit of contact with the natural environment.

The team found that, while the majority of quantitative studies reported no effect on health and well-being, there was limited evidence to suggest positive effects on self-reported health, quality of life and [physical activity](#) levels. Small numbers of participants reported increased mental fatigue and greater feelings of anxiety.

The review comes at a time when there is growing research and policy interest in the potential for using the natural environment to enhance human health and well-being. It is thought that contact with the natural environment has a positive impact on health and well-being.

Outdoor environmental enhancement and conservation activities include unpaid litter picking, tree planting or path maintenance. It is thought that

these offer opportunities for physical activity alongside greater connection with local environments, enhanced social connections within communities, and improved self-esteem, which may, in turn, further improve well-being for the individual.

The team worked with Cochrane Public Health to assess the health and well-being impacts on adults following participation in environmental enhancement and [conservation activities](#). Participants were adult volunteers or were referred by a healthcare professional.

The nineteen studies reviewed included numerical data (quantitative) and text from interviews (qualitative), together with data from 3,603 participants who came from the UK, US, Canada and Australia.

The qualitative studies illustrate the experiences of people taking part, and their perceptions of the benefits. People reported feeling better. They liked the opportunity for increased social contact, especially if they had been socially isolated through, for example, mental ill-health. They also valued a sense of achievement, being in nature and provision of a daily structure.

"Research into this area is not very robust and quality of the design and reporting is low, therefore we cannot draw any definite conclusions about any positive or negative effects. However, participants perceived that there was a benefit," said Dr Kerryn Husk, research fellow from Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry and the lead author of the *Cochrane Review*.

He added: "We were able to develop a conceptual framework that illustrates the range of interlinked mechanism through which people believe they potentially achieved [health](#) and well-bring benefits. We hope this will help future research on this this topic."

Provided by University of Plymouth

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