

## The benefits of the Outdoors

### How can nature benefit my mental health?

Spending time outdoors or bringing nature into your everyday life can benefit both your mental and physical health and wellbeing. For example, doing things like growing food or flowers, exercising outdoors or being around animals can have lots of positive effects. It can:

- improve your mood,
- reduce feelings of stress or anger,
- help you take time out and feel more relaxed,
- improve your physical health
- improve your confidence and self-esteem,
- help you be more active,
- help you make new connections,
- provide peer support.

It has been medically proven that fresh air, doing things to nurture something else as well as yourself helps wellbeing, and provides a focus on something other than ourselves. For example, things like gardening, the act of physically helping something to grow and develop helps us. It gives a sense of purpose and the act of growing means that some type of routine has to be set and worked to. You may not have a large garden and you may even think gardening isn't for you, but should that initial feeling stop you from trying?

We all have different experiences of nature, and different reasons for wanting to connect with it more – or feeling unsure about whether to try. You might find you get something completely different from one activity compared to someone else.

### Nature and mental health problems

Spending time in nature has been found to help with mental health problems including anxiety and depression.

Being outside in natural light can also be helpful if you experience seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a type of depression that affects people during particular seasons or times of the year.

### Does Being in Nature Impact Our Wellbeing?

Research reveals that environments can increase or reduce our stress levels, which in turn impacts our bodies. What you are seeing, hearing, experiencing at any moment is changing not only your mood, but how your nervous, endocrine, and immune systems are working.

So, thinking about it and how this could help with so many things, try to answer the questions below:

- Nature heals. How, how could this work for you?
- Nature soothes. How? Maybe this is a place you know like a country walk or sitting on a beach and watching the waves?
- Nature restores. One of the most intriguing areas of current research is the impact of nature on general wellbeing. In one study in “Mind,” 95% of those interviewed said their mood improved after spending time outside, changing from depressed, stressed, and anxious to more calm and balanced
- Nature connects. This experience of connection may be explained by studies that used MRI to measure brain activity. When participants viewed nature scenes, the parts of the brain associated with empathy and love lit up, but when they viewed urban scenes, the parts of the brain associated with fear and anxiety were activated.

This is really a topic that takes time to explore and understand as each person’s experience of it will be individual and will be a personal experience for everyone. July Is National Picnic Month and is also the month for Love Parks Week which runs from 23<sup>rd</sup> July – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021, so why not pack a picnic and head off to your favourite park to spend some time outdoors!

### Useful sources & Information:

Some of the information sourced for this article was originally published by Mind. If you would like to access this and further information in more detail please follow the links below –

<https://www.mind.org.uk/get-involved/mental-health-awareness-week/>.

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### How can Care first help?

If you feel you may need some emotional or practical support, you can contact Care first on the Freephone number. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. Whilst our BACP accredited Counsellors are available 24/7 to provide support with emotional issues, our expertly trained Information Specialists are also available 8am-8pm Monday-Friday to provide advice on any practical issues that may be causing you a stress or worry and help you feel more in control of a situation.

All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

If you would like to view the Webinar on ‘**The benefits of Nature on our Mental Health**’ a recording of the session can be accessed using the link below –

[https://youtu.be/\\_sDpr\\_Q-JhE](https://youtu.be/_sDpr_Q-JhE)