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Green prescriptions and mental health

POSTED ON: 6 NOVEMBER 2020 | BY: [KERRI HALL](#)

Spending time in nature is believed to benefit people's mental health. However, our new research published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, suggests that giving people with existing mental health conditions formal 'green prescriptions', may undermine some of the benefits.

Our international research team investigated whether contact with nature has the potential to help people with mental health issues to manage their symptoms. We found that nature is associated with a number of benefits for these individuals, but only if they chose to visit these places themselves.

Using BlueHealth International Survey data from more than 18,000 people in 18 different countries, our analyses suggest that whilst pressure to spend time outdoors can encourage people to visit nature, it can also undermine the potential emotional and wellbeing benefits of having contact with nature.

Our researchers found that people with depression were visiting nature as frequently as people with no mental health

issues, while people with anxiety were visiting significantly more often. On the whole, both groups also tended to feel happy and reported low anxiety during these visits.

However, the benefits of nature seem to be undermined when visits were not by choice. The more pressure people felt to visit nature, the less motivated people were and the more anxious they felt.

Our lead researcher, [Dr Michelle Tester-Jones](#), said: *“These findings are consistent with wider research that suggests that urban natural environments provide spaces for people to relax and recover from stress. However, they also demonstrate that healthcare practitioners and loved ones should be sensitive when recommending time in nature for people who have depression and anxiety. It could be helpful to encourage them to spend more time in places that people already enjoy visiting; so they feel comfortable and can make the most of the experience.”*

This research provides evidence that careful techniques to discuss accessing nature as a means of self- or supported-management for people with mental health issues, need to be integrated into these programmes to offer people the best support.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Funding and collaboration

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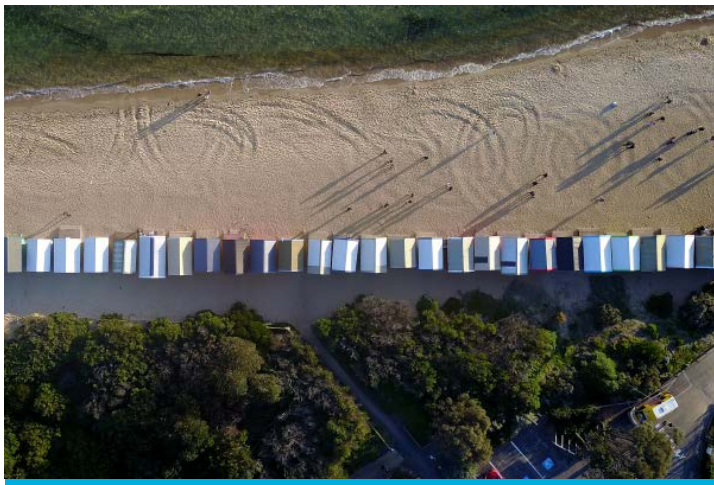
The pressure to spend time in nature could undermine the potential wellbeing benefits (Image from [Unsplash](#)).

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