# Study reveals nature's impact on pain perception



A recent study from the universities of Exeter and Vienna has unveiled interesting insights into the potential effects of nature on pain perception. Researchers discovered that exposure to natural scenes can change the brain's response to processing pain, potentially offering alternative pain management strategies.

The study involved 49 participants who were monitored while receiving small electric shocks. During the experiment, individuals were shown videos featuring three different environments: natural landscapes, urban cityscapes, and indoor office settings. Results indicated that participants reported feeling significantly less pain when viewing the nature videos compared to the urban and office scenes. Both subjective pain ratings and brain scans exhibited a reduction in activity linked to pain perception during the nature exposure.

Max Steininger, the lead author and a PhD student at the University of Vienna, commented on the findings, stating, "Numerous studies have shown that people consistently report feeling less pain when exposed to nature." He noted that their research is pioneering in its ability to demonstrate through brain imaging that these effects are not merely a result of placebo—driven by beliefs and expectations that nature is beneficial. Instead, the brain actively responds by diminishing the perception of pain. Steininger remarked, "The pain-relieving effect of nature is genuine," though he clarified that its efficacy is around half that of typical painkillers. He emphasised that individuals undergoing pain should continue any prescribed medications while considering the potential role of nature in pain management.

In alignment with Steininger’s insights, Dr Alex Smalley from the University of Exeter highlighted that the study suggests virtual encounters with nature could provide therapeutic benefits, especially for individuals unable to access natural environments. He remarked, “This study highlights how virtual encounters can bring the healing potential of nature to people when they can’t get outside.” Dr Smalley also pointed to the implications for public health, asserting that the findings reinforce the importance of protecting natural environments while encouraging community engagement with nature.

The study’s publication in Nature Communications has opened new avenues for further research aimed at understanding the impact of nature on mental and physical well-being, particularly in the context of non-drug treatments for pain management.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://news.exeter.ac.uk/faculty-of-health-and-life-sciences/watching-nature-scenes-can-reduce-pain-new-study-shows/> - This URL supports the claim that watching nature scenes can reduce pain, as shown in a recent neuroimaging study. It highlights the potential of nature for pain management.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2264925/> - This article discusses how environmental factors, including nature views and sounds, can influence pain perception and control. It provides background on the benefits of nature in healthcare settings.
* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-32451-4> - Although not directly available, this would typically be where studies like the one mentioned are published, supporting the publication of research in Nature Communications.
* <https://www.vacourts.gov/courts/scv/rulesofcourt.pdf> - This URL does not directly support the article's claims but is included as it was part of the search results. It pertains to legal procedures rather than the effects of nature on pain.
* <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/ap20-seminar-task-2-iwa-directions-and-stimulus-materials.pdf> - This URL does not directly support the article's claims. It relates to academic research tasks rather than the effects of nature on pain.