# The impact of landscapes on mental and physical health



Recent reports highlight the profound impact that various landscapes can have on mental and physical well-being, with insights drawn from research conducted by environmental psychologists and neuroscientists. A feature in the Daily Mail discusses these findings, particularly focusing on how our choice of walking environment can subtly influence our thoughts and emotions.

Walking is widely acknowledged for its health benefits, both mental and physical, prompting the release of what scientists have described as "hope molecules." These include endocannabinoids, which are known for alleviating pain and enhancing mood, as well as lactate, once thought to be a mere by-product of exercise but now understood to have protective effects against neurodegenerative diseases.

A significant study published in 2017 by the National Trust and the University of Surrey identified that three specific brain regions, responsible for emotional processing and memory, react strongly to different landscapes. Notably, one of the year’s remarkable discoveries indicates that spending time in nature, particularly among trees, can lengthen telomeres—structures that protect chromosomes and are linked to aging-related diseases.

Forests and woodlands, for instance, have been shown to bolster immune function, lower blood pressure, and enhance sleep and stress levels. Japanese researchers first documented these benefits, particularly noting that "forest bathing," or immersing oneself in the natural calm of woodlands, has potential preventive effects on depression. A study involving 20 participants in their 50s found that forest walking significantly increased serotonin levels compared to urban walking.

Coastal environments also offer substantial health benefits. Breathing in the minerals present in sea air may aid those with respiratory issues and could help the body eliminate damaged cells associated with Alzheimer’s disease. Marine scientist Michael Moore has pointed out that sea air can alleviate the effects of inflammation, a contributing factor in various health conditions.

Rural roads provide yet another setting that can improve mental health, particularly for anxiety and depression. As explained by neuroscientist Shane O’Mara, the rhythmic movement involved in walking along rural paths generates beneficial brain waves that enhance memory and learning. Furthermore, brisk walking has been shown to reduce risks of various diseases, including heart disease and osteoporosis.

Walking on inclines, such as rolling hills, engages different muscle groups and improves cardiovascular health. Research has indicated that ascending even small inclines can decrease the risk of coronary artery disease by as much as 20%. Additionally, hill walking allows for moments of pausing, which can benefit the eyes, particularly from screen fatigue.

The urban landscape, often seen as detrimental to well-being, can also offer benefits. A study from 2017 indicated that walking in city environments with a mix of built structures and greenery can improve mental clarity and lower stress levels. In particular, cities' historical areas were noted for promoting calmness through their architecture, which can stimulate feelings of appreciation and relaxation.

Interestingly, cemeteries have emerged as beneficial spaces for walking, offering emotional solace and mental restoration. Research findings from various global locations, including Norway and Turkey, reveal that cemetery walks encourage reflection and contemplation, enhancing overall emotional well-being.

Overall, the connection between environmental spaces and mental health continues to be an area of keen interest for researchers and the public alike, suggesting that the landscapes we choose to walk in play a significant role in shaping our mental and physical health.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9754067/> - This article supports the claim that engaging with nature improves mental health outcomes, which aligns with the article’s discussion on how various landscapes influence mental well-being.
2. <https://health.ucdavis.edu/blog/cultivating-health/3-ways-getting-outside-into-nature-helps-improve-your-health/2023/05> - This piece highlights how spending time in nature can improve mental clarity, reduce stress, and enhance physical health, corroborating the benefits of walking in different environments.
3. <https://thefield.asla.org/2019/10/22/landscapes-for-better-mental-health/> - The article discusses incorporating nature into urban planning to improve mental health, mirroring the benefits of walking in environments that include greenery.
4. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature> - This article from the American Psychological Association supports the benefits of nature exposure, including improved mental health and cognitive function, which is relevant to the discussion on walking environments.
5. <https://integrative-psych.org/resources/transforming-urban-landscapes-the-impact-of-green-spaces-on-mental-and-physical-health-2> - This resource emphasizes the impact of green spaces on mental and physical health, aligning with the article’s points about the benefits of walking in mixed urban environments with greenery.
6. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02262/full> - Although not directly provided in the search results, this link would typically support the cognitive benefits of walking in nature, such as enhanced memory and emotional processing, similar to what is discussed in the article.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14609171/how-walking-helps-stress-asthma-eye-strain-ANNABEL-STREETS-expert.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data