

## Green spaces 'improve health'

**There is more evidence that living near a 'green space' has health benefits.**

Research in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health says the impact is particularly noticeable in reducing rates of mental ill health.

The annual rates of 15 out of 24 major physical diseases were also significantly lower among those living closer to green spaces.

One environmental expert said the study confirmed that green spaces create 'oases' of improved health around them.

The researchers from the VU University Medical Centre in Amsterdam looked at the health records of 350,000 people registered with 195 family doctors across the Netherlands.

Only people who had been registered with their GP for longer than 12 months were included because the study assumed this was the minimum amount of time people would have to live in an environment before any effect of it would be noticeable.

### Health impact

The percentages of green space within a one and three kilometre (0.62 and 1.86 miles) radius of their home were calculated using their postcode.

On average, green space accounted for 42% of the residential area within one kilometre (0.62 miles) radius and almost 61% within a three kilometre (1.86 miles) radius of people's homes.

#### DISEASES THAT BENEFIT MOST FROM GREEN SPACES

- Coronary heart disease
- Neck, shoulder, back, wrist and hand complaints
- Depression and anxiety
- Diabetes
- Respiratory infections and asthma
- Migraine and vertigo
- Stomach bugs and urinary tract infections
- Unexplained physical symptoms

And the annual rates for 24 diseases in 7 different categories were calculated.

The health benefits for most of the diseases were only seen when the greenery was within a one kilometre ( 0.62 miles ) radius of the home.

The exceptions to this were anxiety disorders, infectious diseases of the digestive system and medically unexplained physical symptoms which were seen to benefit even when the green spaces were within three kilometres of the home.

The biggest impact was on anxiety disorders and depression.

### Anxiety disorders

The annual prevalence of anxiety disorders for those living in a residential area containing 10% of green space within a one kilometre (0.62 miles) radius of their home was 26 per 1000 whereas for those living in an area containing 90% of green space it was 18 per 1000.

For depression the rates were 32 per 1000 for the people in the more built up areas and 24 per 1000 for those in the greener areas.

**" At least part of this 'oasis' effect probably reflects changes in air quality "**  
Professor Barbara Maher, Lancaster Environment Centre

The researchers also showed that this relation was strongest for children younger than 12.

They were 21% less likely to suffer from depression in the greener areas.

Two unexpected findings were that the greener spaces did not show benefits for high blood pressure and that the relation appeared stronger for people aged 46 to 65 than for the elderly.

The researchers think the green spaces help recovery from stress and offer greater opportunities for social contacts.

They say the free physical exercise and better air quality could also contribute.

Dr Jolanda Maas of the VU University Medical Centre in Amsterdam, said: "It clearly shows that green spaces are not just a luxury but they relate directly to diseases and the way people feel in their living environments."

"Most of the diseases which are related to green spaces are diseases which are highly prevalent and costly to treat so policy makers need to realise that this is something they may be able to diminish with green spaces."

Professor Barbara Maher of the Lancaster Environment Centre said the study confirmed that green spaces create oases of improved health around them especially for children.

She said: "At least part of this 'oasis' effect probably reflects changes in air quality.

"Anything that reduces our exposure to the modern-day 'cocktail' of atmospheric pollutants has got to be a good thing."

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/8307024.stm>

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