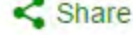


Green spaces worth £2.2bn to public health in England

By Mark Kinver
Environment reporter, BBC News

9 hours ago | [Science & Environment](#)



Enjoying the great outdoors has been shown in studies to improve people's wellbeing, including mental health

Outdoor exercise delivers an estimated £2.2bn of health benefits to adults in England each year, a study suggests.

Scientists calculated that more than eight million people each week took at least 30 minutes of "green exercise".

They hope the results highlight how encouraging more people to use parks will help reverse the trend of rising obesity levels across the UK.

The findings have been presented in the journal *Preventative Medicine*.

"What we look at here is something that can be converted relatively simply into monetary values," explained lead author Mathew White from the European Centre for Environment and Human Health at the University of Exeter.

Dr White told BBC News that since the 1970s there had been studies showing the link between physical activity and health benefits.

"There are very clear ideas about how much physical activity needs to be done in order to benefit health. What we have done here is to focus on those people who use the natural environment for enough activity a week (5x30 minutes) in order to justify gains in their health," he added.

"First of all we looked at the total number of people that went to the natural environment in England each year. Then we looked at the total number of people who engage in what we call an active visit (cycling, walking, running etc).

"We then looked at how often they did that, and if they did it enough times to benefit their health which we converted into something called Quality Adjusted Life Years, which could then be converted into monetary estimates."

Green goddess

The study estimated that it was worth an average of £2.2bn each year. Dr White said that there had been relatively few attempts to place a monetary estimate on the societal benefits from green exercise.

But he cautioned: "Just to make it clear, we are not saying this is the only way. There were a lot of people who achieve the physical activity guidelines who never went to nature, so we are not saying that it is the only way to do it but we are saying that a very large number of people who do achieve the guidelines do use nature."



"Outdoor gyms" have become increasingly popular as authorities attempt to encourage more people to take "green exercise"

Dr White explained that the study only focused on those people who used natural environments to exercise and it did not look at people who used gyms or health centres for physical activities.

Explaining the study's findings, he said the data revealed a "socio-economic gradient".

"It tends to be people from higher socio-economic groups who were more active in the environment, more so than people from lower socio-economic groups," he observed.

"But crucially, among the two groups, once they were in the environment they do the same level of activity.

"So we think encouraging people from these lower groups to go to these essentially free environments will mean that once they are there then they will do as much physical activity as higher socio-economic groups. So it can help reduce inequalities in health."

Run, forest, run

The team suggested that the findings presented a clear indication of the potential implications of policymakers tackling the upward trend in UK obesity levels through the use and availability of "essentially free-at-the-point-of-access environments".

Dr White added: "We already know that many people with weight issues do not like going to the gym because they feel socially embarrassed, whereas a walk in the park does not have that stigma.

"We think it really takes the pressure of these groups in particular. The cost to the health service of obesity is just enormous and is growing every year. If we can encourage more people to do these simple activities outdoors we can make significant inroads into that trend."

Follow Mark [on Twitter](#).

Share this story



More on this story

Global science programme to focus on urban wellbeing

9 December 2014

Green spaces have lasting positive effect on well-being

12 January 2014

Green spaces 'can save NHS billions'

6 November 2013

Human wellbeing can strengthen case for conservation

19 December 2012

Does outdoor play help keep the doctor away?

10 February 2012

Related Internet links

[European Centre for Environment and Human Health](#)

[Preventative Medicine journal](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external Internet sites

Science & Environment



China embarked on wind power frenzy, says IEA

20 September 2016

[Science & Environment](#)



'Let mangroves recover' to protect coasts

19 September 2016

[Science & Environment](#)



Second lowest minimum for Arctic ice

15 September 2016

[Science & Environment](#)

More Videos from the BBC

Recommended by Outbrain



Prince William helps Essex aide as he slips on pavement



Lyse Doucet reunites with Syrian refugee family in Canada



George Osborne's first interview after sacking



Taxi driver guilty of second murder



Becky Godden murder: The five-year delay for justice



Domino's Pizza wheelie rider topples off bike

Elsewhere on BBC

Recommended by Outbrain



[BBC News](#)

Could Austria's 16-year-olds derail far-right vote?



[BBC Travel](#)

What can Albania teach us about trust?



[BBC News](#)

John Simpson 'back from the brink' after health scare



[BBC Culture](#)

Do you know the meaning of the dictionary's newest words?



[BBC News](#)

Emmys: Rami Malek leads victories for minority actors



[BBC Autos](#)

My summer working as an Uber bike messenger

Top Stories

UN suspends all aid convoys to Syria

The UN suspends all aid convoys in Syria after its lorries were attacked by warplanes near Aleppo on Monday.

19 minutes ago

Trump questions NY suspect's medical care

6 hours ago

N Korea rocket engine test 'a success'

8 hours ago

Features & Analysis



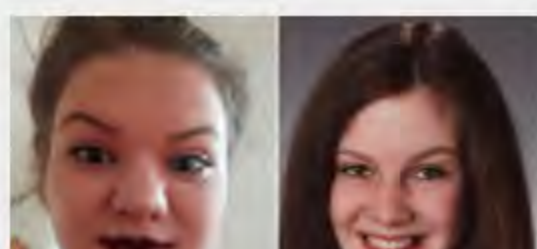
Be-all-and-end-all?

Why many Chinese say they no longer believe in marriage



Orange secret

Could turmeric really boost your health?



Old enough to vote

Could Austrian teenagers derail the far-right?



Appetite for revenge

How India's army might avenge the Kashmir attack



Paralympic perfection

Nigeria's powerlifters show football stars how to win



Back on the ballot

Islamists gamble on making a return in Jordanian elections



Refusing to stand

Kneeling student athletes join US national anthem protest



Divided sidewalk

Abortion wars on the streets of North Dakota



Acting up?

The Emmy moments that created a buzz

Most Popular

[Read](#) [Watched](#)

- [UN suspends all aid convoys to Syria](#) **1**
- [Trump questions NY suspect's medical care](#) **2**
- [Jim Carrey slates 'heartless' legal case](#) **3**
- [Cuban players jailed for rape in Finland](#) **4**
- [Baron's daughter killed in Philippines](#) **5**
- [Outrage over British Colonial restaurant](#) **6**
- [Seven arrests over 'mass school brawl'](#) **7**
- [Could turmeric really boost your health?](#) **8**
- [Migrants flee burning Greek camp](#) **9**
- [N Korea rocket engine test 'a success'](#) **10**

From Around the Web

Promoted content by Outbrain



This Is What It Was Like To Visit Syria Before The War

[TheExpeditioner](#)



A Peek at a New Superyacht With Its Own Private Beach

[Mansion Global](#)



Ransomware: An ever-evolving menace

[CSO](#)



In India's Silicon Valley, the water wars have turned...

[PRI](#)



Save the Planet with These Laundry Detergent...

[Naturalcave](#)



Trying to confront a massive flood risk, Jakarta faces...

[PRI](#)

Ads by Google

kidney failure

Provide personal treatment plan! Get way from chronic kidney failure! www.kidneydoctors.org

TV Channel Free Download

Use Your Computer as a TV. Get the MyTelevisionHQ App Now! www.mytelevisionhq.com

Free Diploma Online

600+ Self-Paced Interactive Courses Achieve Diploma & Certificate Level alison.com/OnlineDiploma

BBC News Services

[On your mobile](#)

[On your connected tv](#)

[Get news alerts](#)

[Contact BBC News](#)

Explore the BBC

[News](#)

[Capital](#)

[CBBC](#)

[Arts](#)

[Sport](#)

[Culture](#)

[CBeebies](#)

[Make It Digital](#)

[Weather](#)

[Autos](#)

[Food](#)

[Taster](#)

[Shop](#)

[Future](#)

[iWonder](#)

[Nature](#)

[Earth](#)

[TV](#)

[Bitesize](#)

[Local](#)

[Travel](#)

[Radio](#)

[Music](#)