

Benefits and impacts of improved physical and mental health

There are a number of physical and mental health benefits related to increased relaxation, spending time with family and exercise such as walking and cycling.

According to the Chief Medical Officer:

"If a medication existed which had a similar effect to physical activity [like walking], it would be regarded as a wonder drug or a miracle cure."

Data shows that walking regularly at any speed will:

- **help manage weight**
- **reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes**
- **reduce the risk of certain cancers**
- **improve flexibility and strength of joints, muscles and bones, and reduce the risk of osteoporosis**
- **increase 'good' cholesterol**
- **boost the immune system**
- **improve mood, reduce anxiety, aid sleep and improve self-image**

A new study by scientists from the University of East Anglia has officially confirmed the 'significant and wide-ranging health benefits' of spending time outdoors and living closer to nature. Findings revealed that exposure to green spaces can boost your health in so many ways, including reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, premature death, and high blood pressure².

As well as health impacts, there are significant socioeconomic implications. Physical inactivity currently costs the NHS between £1bn and £1.8bn a year. Costs to the wider economy are conservatively estimated at £5.5bn in sickness absence and £1bn in premature deaths – a total of £8.3bn.

Research also shows that feeling more relaxed can reduce stress in a person's everyday life which is vital for maintaining overall health, as it can improve mood, boost immune function, promote longevity and allow you to be more productive.

A study by the New Economics Foundation found there were 17,500 episodes where stress or anxiety was the primary cause for hospital admissions in 2016/17, which led to 165,800 days when beds were occupied.

According to the think tank, the average cost of a bed day to the NHS is around £429, which means the total cost to the taxpayer of these episodes is £71.1m.

In 2010 the UK Government launched the National Wellbeing Programme to:

"Start measuring our progress as a country, not just by how our economy is growing, but by how our lives are improving; not just by our standard of living, but by our quality of life."

In response the Office of National Statistics established a national programme to develop and publish an accepted and trusted set of statistics for wellbeing, to complement traditional economic measures such as GDP. Examples of indicators on this framework include:

- **healthy life expectancy**
- **sports participation**
- **accessed natural environment**
- **satisfaction with leisure time**
- **mental wellbeing**
- **satisfaction with overall lives**
- **overall happiness**
- **satisfaction with health**

Evidence from the 2019 Economic Benefits study shows that the **UK holiday park sector is making a positive contribution to visitors' health and wellbeing, supporting the UK policy agenda.**



²<https://www.countryliving.com/uk/wildlife/countryside/a22087167/nature-great-health-benefits-new-study/>