



# ECEHH Research Insight: The value of 'Green Exercise'

A bite size summary of research, Nov 2022

Physical activity in natural environments, or 'green exercise', is estimated to provide health benefits of £2.2 billion a year to the English adult population.



## Who is this relevant to?

Public health professionals, policy makers, health research bodies.

## Background

Researchers from the University of Exeter Medical School and Public Health England analysed data from the world's largest study on recreational visits to natural places, such as parks, woods and beaches. Green exercise was defined in the study as nature-based activities of moderate to vigorous intensity and lasting over 30 minutes. Examples included dog walking, running, horse riding, outdoor swimming and mountain biking. Because physical activity needs to be regular and sustained to benefit health, the team focused on those who reported regularly meeting government guidelines for physical activity (i.e. 5 x 30 minutes each week). They then worked out what proportion of these people's weekly physical activity took place in natural settings and estimated the benefits to health associated with their levels of green exercise if sustained across the year.

## Findings

The research was conducted in collaboration with [Public Health England](#) as part of the Health Protection Research Unit in Environmental Change and Health.

It estimates that over 8 million adults in England engage in green exercise each week, resulting in over 1.3 billion green exercise visits a year.

Because society is willing to invest resources in extending and saving lives, financial estimates of the monetary "value" of these benefits could be made of £2.2 billion a year.

The team recognises the need for caution in interpreting their results but were reassured by finding very similar outcomes using two different approaches to analysing the data.



## Recommendations

Parks, gardens, coasts and countryside play a vital role in improving health in the UK, inspiring millions to get active outdoors every year. This research highlights the positive impact getting outdoors has on health and the financial value associated with this. The evidence emphasises the importance of both promoting exercise outdoors to a wider population and maintaining the quality and accessibility of the nation's parks and wild places.



## Selected References/Resources

[Recreational physical activity in natural environments and implications for health: A population based cross-sectional study in England – ScienceDirect](#)

“We’ve known for a long time that regular physical activity is good for health and reduces the burden on health services. We have now worked out approximately how much physical activity regularly takes place in England’s natural environments and how much this benefits adult health across the population. Ultimately these benefits will translate into savings for the NHS, highlighting the need to both maintain and promote our natural environments for exercise and health.”

Dr Mathew White, Lead Author

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“Our parks, gardens, coasts and countryside play a vital role in improving health in this country, inspiring millions of us to get active outdoors every year. Evidence suggests that access to good quality green space is linked to feeling healthier, a lower body mass index and decreased levels of obesity, and improved mental health and wellbeing. This research highlights the positive impact getting outdoors has on our health, emphasising the importance of both promoting exercise outdoors to a wider population and maintaining the quality and accessibility of the nation’s parks and wild places.” Dr Angie Bone, Head of Extreme Events at Public Health England,

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