

Go to the Park: The Power of Green Spaces in Urban Areas on Your Wellbeing

Across our planet, 55% of people live in urban areas – that number is expected to increase to [68% by the year 2050](#).

In the grand scheme of human history, the fixed addresses and infrastructure of our urban environments is a relatively new phenomenon: we only moved away (or rather stopped moving) from a nomadic lifestyle among the wilderness about [10,000](#) years ago, after approximately [200,000](#) as hunter-gatherers.

In the millennia that have passed since, we've built up cities and buildings, trading concrete for grass.

Whether this was a good choice is up for debate.

In a 2011 study, the Economist Intelligence Unit conducted a [“green city index” study](#) on environmentally friendly cities. On the “land use” metric, New York City came first; Cleveland, Ohio, last. In a May 2017 survey, [a Happiest Cities list](#) found Cleveland was the 149th out of 150 cities.

The effect of urban green spaces on health has been studied by the World Health Organization (WHO). [They've reported on evidence that demonstrates](#) improved mental health, reduced cardiovascular morbidity and mortality, improved pregnancy outcomes and more owing to green spaces.

On the mental health side, the WHO credits green spaces' ability to provide “psychological relaxation and stress alleviation” as well as providing a public access point for physical activity that contribute to better health.

For those without the sweeping vastness of New York City's [Central Park](#) or Vancouver's [Stanley Park](#) available in their home cities, you're in luck: according to [a study in the journal BMC Public Health](#), there is no significant link between the amount of green space and “their mental wellbeing”. Have a soccer field nearby? A small pond? An overgrown lot? Those should do, according to researchers.

[A study from the Netherlands](#) observed that attitudes toward the accessibility of green space influenced their reported satisfaction and ultimately, happiness, with living in their neighbourhood.

One of the great benefits of green spaces are that they are at heart, a public commons in which [we all hold a stake](#). They bring people together and allow everyone to feel pride and belonging, together. They're important social connectors too – in many cities, a significant portion of community-run activities, sports and initiatives take place in parklands that are accessible to people from all walks of life.

Interested but not sure how to become a green space guru in your city? Here are some tips:

1. Look up your city's parks and recreation website. They'll likely have details that can show you what parks are closest to you, what facilities are available there, what activities you can sign up for and when and how to get involved in taking care of your local park.
2. We've previously talked about the importance of taking a lunch break at work for your mental health. Consider adding an extra shot of green space into that prescription by taking your lunch outside into a local park.

3. Skip the bar and suggest meeting at a local park to your friend or potential date. Not only will a nature walk be healthier and provide an enjoyable experience among better scenery, it'll also be a lot easier on your wallet.
4. We've talked about the mental wellbeing boosting effects of volunteering and giving back to your community. If you've got a litter problem in your local park, consider spending some time helping clean it up. Not only will you be making the space more enjoyable for yourself, but you'll be helping others, who might also be inspired to become a park protector.
5. Take the path less travelled. Many urban parks provide concrete paths for you to ride your bike on or walk along. Who says you're limited to that? Take a walk on the wild side by heading into the trees and brush for a more natural experience.

If all you see when you look out the window is endless concrete and glass, it's time to get back in touch with your roots, and some tree roots. Get out to a park now – the grass is always greener outside.