

HEALTH & BODY

# Connecting with nature: how it benefits our well-being, health and relationships

 **CATEGORY**



**We all know that connecting with nature is great for relaxing, but, as **Dee Marques** explains, in fact, it has a scientifically-proven impact on our health and happiness, boosting emotions and relationships.**





Have you ever felt enveloped by a feeling of **awe** and inspiration after watching a **nature** documentary? For centuries, the connection between humans and nature has been a key concern for people from all cultures, and recently, science has given us more reasons to believe in the benefits of having a deeper connection with nature. Let's take a look at how staying close to



nature benefits our well-being, health, and relationships.

## What's the connection between humans and nature?

The human-nature connection has been studied by academics for decades. In the 1980s **developmental psychologists** observed that the tendency to get close to nature is present in young children and put forward the hypothesis that we are **genetically predisposed to seek a connection with nature.**

Interestingly, **another study** revealed that this desire to find a connection with nature was evident even     citations of




nature, such as wall art. Researchers at a psychiatric hospital in Sweden noted that while patients had negative reactions to abstract art paintings and decorations, they consistently responded positively to art that depicted scenes of nature.



Connecting with nature has positive effects on emotions and relationships



This has led researchers to suggest there's a built-in bias towards natural environments. Some have suggested that we prefer natural spaces because, originally, they provided us with everything we needed to prosper and evolve as a species. Whether this preference for nature is coded in our genes or not is still subject to debate within the scientific community. However, although we may not fully understand the details of the human-nature affiliation, the beneficial effects of connecting with nature cannot be denied.

Moreover, scientists have found **similar evidence in cross-cultural studies**, suggesting that    ss to get close

to nature is due to more than just aesthetic preferences. In a way, we can say that the belief that a nature connection is good for us and has some sort of healing effect on soul and body is universal.






## **The link between nature, our emotions, and relationships**

It seems clear that the environment we live in plays an important role in our emotional state and overall level of **happiness**. In fact, according to science, natural environments have two major benefits for our emotions. Firstly, being connected to nature can lead to **stress reduction** and mood improvement. Research studies have found a correlation between exposure to natural



stimuli, stress and anger reduction, and improvement in self-reported psychological well-being and mental health.

“Being connected to nature can lead to stress reduction and mood improvement. The second key emotional benefit involves enjoying stronger bonds with others.”

Those of us who live in urban environments (more than 50 per cent of the global population according to **recent statistics**) often      ing to spend

time in nature because it gives us a break from the hyper-stimulation of the senses we experience in cities. This **calming effect** has even been observed in EEG tests, which showed a physical response to nature in more stable brain waves and in a blood flow increase to the amygdala, the organ that controls stress and fear.



Being in nature leads to stress reduction and mood improvement





The second key emotional benefit of feeling attuned to nature involves enjoying stronger bonds with others. A better and more relaxed mood translates into a more **compassionate** attitude that can improve the quality of our social bonds. Supporting this argument are studies that prove that exposure to nature by simply watching *Planet Earth* videos fostered **cooperation and altruism between participants**.




## **How emotions influence our health**

Like a domino effect, nature influences our emotions and relationships, and in turn, these affect our overall health and happiness. For example, being in nature generates emotions like awe, joy, serenity,



gratitude, and inspiration. According to psychologists, these positive emotions build up a range of micro-moments that over time contribute to a deep sense of happiness.

“Like a domino effect, nature influences our emotions and relationships, and in turn, these affect our overall health and happiness.”

Other science-based studies have shown that positive emotions can lead to a reduction in the    developing

heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure, as well as helping improve chronic and inflammatory disease. Other research findings suggest that positive emotions can help boost resistance to illness and strengthen the immune system.



Spend time in nature by visiting parks and gardens; even better with friends!

Connecting with      the takeaway

Developing a connection with nature can only benefit us, but how can we achieve this in a world that is increasingly disconnected from it? We don't need to become hermits and live in a remote mountain hut to appreciate nature and build a connection with it. Some practical ideas that you can easily put into practice include:

- Visiting parks and gardens
- Organising a picnic, or try to meet others outdoors whenever possible
- Taking up gardening or **kitchen garden**
- Growing your own herbs or vegetable patch



- Taking your time to savour whole foods
- Getting started with **stargazing** or birdwatching
- Going on a hiking or camping holiday

In fact, simply taking time to consider your connection with nature and what small actions you can take to improve its quality may bring benefits. To the extent that you can, try to cultivate the natural inclination humans feel towards nature in all its manifestations, and let the therapeutic effect of nature improve the quality and enjoyment of your life. ●



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