

## Walking Along Blue Spaces Such as Beaches or Lakes Benefits Mental Health

*New study identifies benefits to mood and well-being associated with short, frequent walks near bodies of water*

**Barcelona, 6 July 2020. Short, frequent walks in blue spaces**—areas that prominently feature water, such as beaches, lakes, rivers or fountains—may have a **positive effect on people’s well-being and mood**, according to a new study led by the [Barcelona Institute for Global Health \(ISGlobal\)](#), a centre supported by the “la Caixa” Foundation.

The study, conducted within the [BlueHealth](#) project and published in [Environmental Research](#), used data on 59 adults. Over the course of one week, participants **spent 20 minutes each day walking** in a blue space. In a different week, they spent 20 minutes each day walking in an urban environment. During yet another week, they spent the same amount of time resting indoors. The **blue space route was along a beach in Barcelona**, while the **urban route was along city streets**. Before, during and after each activity, researchers measured the participants’ blood pressure and heart rate and used questionnaires to assess their well-being and mood.

“We saw a **significant improvement in the participants’ well-being and mood** immediately after they went for a walk in the blue space, compared with walking in an urban environment or resting,” commented **Mark Nieuwenhuijsen**, Director of the [Urban Planning, Environment and Health Initiative](#) at ISGlobal and coordinator of the study. Specifically, after taking a short walk on the beach in Barcelona, participants reported **improvements in their mood, vitality and mental health**.

The authors did not identify any cardiovascular health benefits, although they believe this may be due to the design of the study. “We assessed the **immediate effects** of taking a short walk along a blue space,” commented ISGlobal researcher **Cristina Vert**, lead author of the study. “**Continuous, long-lasting exposure** to these spaces might have positive effects on cardiovascular health that we were not able to observe in this study.”

### The Importance of the Environment on Health

“Our results show that the **psychological benefits of physical activity vary according to the type of environment** where it is carried out, and that blue spaces are better than urban spaces in this regard,” commented Vert.

Numerous ISGlobal studies have identified health benefits associated with green spaces, including [lower risk of obesity](#), [better attention capacities in children](#) and [slower physical decline in older adults](#). The new study provides evidence showing that blue spaces are an **environment favourable to mental health**.

“According to the United Nations, 55% of the global population now lives in cities,” explained Nieuwenhuijsen. “It is crucial to identify and enhance elements that improve our health—such as blue spaces—so that we can create **healthier, more sustainable and more liveable cities**.”

## Reference

Cristina Vert, Mireia Gascon, Otavio Ranzani, Sandra Márquez, Margarita Triguero-Mas, Glòria Carrasco-Turigas, Lourdes Arjona, Sarah Koch, Maria Llopis, David Donaire-Gonzalez, Lewis R. Elliott, Mark Nieuwenhuijsen. *Physical and mental health effects of repeated short walks in a blue space environment: A randomised crossover study.*

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2020.109812>

## About ISGlobal

The Barcelona Institute of Global Health (ISGlobal) is the result of an innovative alliance between the "la Caixa" Foundation and academic and government institutions. The Institute was set up to contribute to the work undertaken by the international community to address global health challenges. ISGlobal has consolidated a hub of excellence in research and medical care that has its roots in work first started in the world of health care by the Hospital Clínic and the Mar Health Park and in the academic sphere by the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. The pivotal mechanism of its work model is the transfer of knowledge generated by scientific research to practice, a task undertaken by the Institute's Education, Policy and Global Development departments. ISGlobal is accredited as a Severo Ochoa Centre of Excellence and is a member of CERCA, the Catalan Government's network of research centres.

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