

# Getting Your Roots Done!

**HEALTH AND BEAUTY:** Recent research evidence suggests that spending a little time out in green spaces can be good not only for mental health but surprisingly physical health too.....



When was the last time you got up close and personal with green open spaces? The fashion for minimalist living in an urban landscape of glass and steel may be aesthetically pleasing and convenient for the 21<sup>st</sup> century woman – plenty of eats, theatre and shopping. A modern lifestyle though, may be less good for our mental and physical health, or so a recent scientific report by scientists from the University of Queensland suggests. Danielle F. Shanahan and her colleagues looked at the health profiles of over 1500 residents of Brisbane city and measured their use of open spaces. Their surprising results suggested that getting in touch with your grass roots, parks and greenery for as little as half an hour a week could make a difference to your blood pressure, BMI and even your mental health.

## What does the research claim?

Exposure to green spaces can be measured in terms of “doses” exactly the same as we might take a dose of Anadin or an antibiotic. The research makes the claim that while health improves the more a person is exposed to open spaces, a single “dose” of 30 minutes can bring significant health benefits particularly in combatting high blood pressure and depression. While these are not the only positive health benefits, these can be easily quantified and it is suggested that high blood pressure and poor mental health could be reduced by around 7-9% if more people dosed themselves with nature, weekly. In UK alone the societal cost of depression is estimated at £8.6bn a year. So by building in or keeping accessible green spaces and encouraging us to use them, we could all save on our health care bills.

## How does it work?

It seems that our senses enjoy the complexity of the outlines and movement which open spaces bring. It gives them a “rest” from concentration by presenting variety – colour, shape, texture even smells and sounds. Green spaces and growing trees are also usually pleasing but in a different way from architecture – the patterns are unpredictable and we can stumble on beauty by chance.

If we go to a park or nature reserve, we often take family and friends and make a conscious effort for “me time” something women are notoriously bad at while seeking to look after the needs of others. “Social cohesion” or how important our friendships are, a key feature of positive mental health appears to be linked to our use of green spaces too.

### **What can you do?**

Even in winter, we have many bright, clear days and a brisk walk in the cool, invigorating air can still do the trick! Make sure that you make time for you and go to a green space for at least 30 minutes a week. When you are there do anything you like – meditate, yoga, walk or even just take in the whole sensuous experience. If you have kids, take them to the park on the way home from school, remember proper exposure to sunshine helps to build strong bones and trees with open spaces, imagination. Those of us who are less constrained by family needs can luckily choose a time of day – the cool of the early morning or dusk can offer their own rewards. Remember, getting in touch with your natural roots for 30 minutes a week could save your life!

### **Reference**

Danielle F. Shanahan et al (2016) “*Health Benefit from Nature Experiences Depend on Dose*”  
**Scientific reports 6, Article number 28551 (2016)**

**Word count 611**

**Available to purchase £40**

COPYRIGHT LMD