

# Walking along blue spaces such as beaches or lakes benefits mental health

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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 center 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 favorable 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."

**More information:** Cristina Vert et al, Physical and mental health effects of repeated short walks in a blue space environment: A randomised crossover study, *Environmental Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.envres.2020.109812](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2020.109812)

Provided by Barcelona Institute for Global Health

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