

Nature helps us cope with body image 'threats'

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A new study has found that being in nature helps people deal with negative body image by removing some of the triggers of body image anxiety, such as the focus on social media, and strengthening coping

mechanisms to keep negative feelings in perspective.

The research, published in the journal *Ecopsychology*, involved 401 participants from the U.K., who were asked to complete a survey about their exposure to nature, "rational acceptance," and body appreciation.

Rational acceptance is a coping mechanism, broadly defined as the way people rationalize and keep in perspective any feelings of [negative body image](#) that come and go.

The study found [positive associations](#) between all three measures in both men and women.

The paper, the first to look at how exposure to nature can help the mind cope with temporary feelings of negative body image, concludes that spending time in [natural environments](#) provides opportunities for healthy body image coping strategies. This may be due to the physical and mental distancing from the sources of body image threats such as unrealistic appearance standards, mirrors, or [social media](#).

Being in nature may also help individuals develop healthier thought processes that allow for more realistic appraisals of body image threats and their future consequences.

Lead author Viren Swami, professor of social psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said, "There is already evidence that being in nature in itself promotes positive body image, but this is the first study to look at how exposure to nature can help the mind cope with temporary feelings of negative body image that we all experience from time to time, and keep a sense of perspective.

"Being in nature takes us away from some of the triggers for negative body image—Instagram posts, models on billboards, mirrors—that we

find in urban environments and gives us opportunities to put things into perspective. The restorative qualities of these natural environments may also promote healthier cognitive processes, including greater self-control and a feeling of time passing more slowly, giving us the chance to rationalize these threats.

"We know that positive body image boosts [mental health](#), and this study adds weight to the growing body of evidence about the importance of exposure to nature, and how we need to ensure as a society that everyone has as much access to [natural](#) environments as possible."

More information: Viren Swami et al, Positive Rational Acceptance of Body Image Threats Mediates the Association Between Nature Exposure and Body Appreciation, *Ecopsychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1089/eco.2021.0029](#)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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