

Green Space and Health

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My father always says, "If you don't have good health, you don't have anything." Without good health, it's difficult to enjoy a high quality of life. There's no question that there are a myriad of things that contribute to or detract from a person's mental, physical, and social health and well-being including what we eat, where we live, and even how much green space we have in our lives.

Green space refers to areas within a city or town that are planted and set aside for use as parks, gardens, trails, and conservation. Recent research into the connections between health and green space has shown that access, availability, and use of green space have impacts on many different aspects of our health.

Studies of laboratory and zoo animals show that when these animals are placed in overcrowded, degraded habitats, the social interactions between individuals become more aggressive. In essence, without a healthy habitat, animals can get mean and depressed. The same thing can be said about humans. Research shows that people need a certain amount of green space in order to maintain healthy social interactions.

In addition to social structure, access to and use of green space has been linked to a variety of mental and physical health benefits. One study showed that children in areas with more green space had lower rates of obesity. Another study showed higher death rates in areas with less green space, especially from cardiovascular diseases. Patients

with both ADHD and Alzheimer's disease have showed increased cognitive functions following time spent in nature. People who spend time outdoors can expect to see a range of health improvements, from better concentration, reduced stress, and memory retention to better cardiovascular health, and lower rates of respiratory disease, migraines, intestinal complaints, and more.

It's easy to equate the health benefits of green space with exercise, but a recent study done in Japan suggests that more than just the physical activity is important. This experiment showed that after a 30 minute walk in a forest, blood glucose levels of diabetics dropped much more than it did following other types of exercise, even 3 hours of cycling. For years, nature enthusiasts, writers, and others have been saying that nature is an important part of our quality of life. Now, researchers are seeing that green space may be more important than many ever thought, helping to keep our society, our bodies, and our minds functioning well.

Greenville is a beautiful city, and we are lucky that many here already understand the importance of protecting and setting aside natural areas in our city. The next time you get the chance, take a walk around a park or just sit outside beneath a tree and relax. It's good for your health.

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks." – John Muir

