

Study: Nature may be vital for mental health

By Peter Dockrill, Science Alert

Getting away from it all in the great outdoors has been a proven panacea for generations of city-dwellers, but a new study has quantified how access to nature could be a vital component in our overall mental health.

With more and more of us living in urban areas, researchers from Stanford University wanted to investigate why urbanisation is associated with greater incidences of mental illness. In a controlled experiment, they looked at whether exposure to nature could influence depression levels and specifically 'rumination': repetitive thoughts focused on negative aspects of the self.

The researchers took two groups of participants and led them on 90-minute walks through two very different kinds of environments. One group walked across a grassland area populated with oak trees and shrubs, while the other group walked along the side of a heavily trafficked four-lane highway.

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