**** CTA-220-**Addidtional Value of Water**

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It just makes good sense to know more about the medium, that plays such a major role in, not only our health but the health of coral reefs. Water is the conveyor of all effects on coral reefs. However it is also plays a role in human mental wellbeing. [The Blue Mind.](https://www.wallacejnichols.org/122/bluemind.html)

If you’re seeing red, feeling angry, anxious, and stressed, well, welcome to the postmodern experience. Don’t despair, however. Blue mind science—the study of aquatic environments’ health benefits—could offer the cure for your blues, for free, wherever you may be.

“People can experience the benefits of the water whether they’re near the ocean, a lake, river, swimming pool or even listening to the soothing sound of a fountain,” marine biologist and author of the 2014 book *Blue Mind,*Wallace Nichols, tells Quartz. “Most communities are built near bodies of water not just for practical reasons, but because as humans, we’re naturally drawn to blue space…but even if you aren’t in an area where there is easy access to water, you can still experience [its] emotional benefits.”

Many scribes, poets, painters, and sailors have attested to the feeling of wellness and peace that comes over them when they’re in, or near, bodies of water. “Whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can,” Herman Melville’s narrator declares in *Moby Dick*.

Now scientists are quantifying the positive cognitive and physical effects of water, too. It turns out that living by coasts leads to [an improved sense of physical health](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829212001220?via%3Dihub) and well-being, for example. And contact with water induces [a meditative state](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-water-makes-you-feel-calm_us_56eaf19be4b09bf44a9ca573) that makes us happier, healthier, calmer, more creative, and more capable of awe.



Image: Science Direct

“Water is considered the elixir and source of life. It covers more than 70% of the Earth’s surface, makes up nearly 70% of our bodies, and constitutes over 70% of our heart and brains,” says Nichols. “This deep biological connection has been shown to trigger an immediate response in our brains when we’re near water. In fact, the mere sight and sound of water can induce a flood of neurochemicals that promote wellness, increase blood flow to the brain and heart and induce relaxation. Thanks to science, we’re now able to connect the dots to the full range of emotional benefits being on, in, or near the water can bring.”

Researchers, city planners, and governments want to put this knowledge to practical use, turning water into a tool to promote community health. The European Union in 2016 initiated [Blue Health 2020](http://www.ecehh.org/research-projects/bluehealth/), for example. The four-year cross-disciplinary research project examines the effects of aquatic environments on body and mind, with the goal of exploring the best ways to use water to improve the well-being of people in busy cities.

“The majority of Europe’s population live in urban areas characterized by inland waterways and coastal margins,” the program website explains. [Researchers are studying](https://bluehealth2020.eu/projects/) how to enhance coastlines, draw more people to rivers, and take advantage of the impact of streams on happiness and health, as well as how to use tools like virtual reality and video to induce the same state of calm brought on by being near water.

**Red state, blue state**

Nichols further argues that water is the antidote to “red mind” a state of anxiety created by increased urbanization and near-constant reliance on technology. A [2017 American Psychological Association report](https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2017/technology-social-media.PDF) (pdf) on stress and technology noted that just under half of all adults and 90% of young adults have become “constant checkers,” engaging with screens and social media all the time. This, the APA says, has vastly increased levels of stress—both when tech works and when it doesn’t.

Spending time in and by oceans, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, fountains, and even showers can counter that. *The waters ward off the depression and anxiety created by the relatively recent technological changes, according to Nichols.* Almost all of the senses are engaged—sight, smell, hearing, and touch, and this physical immersion in reality makes us feel better, even though we sometimes imagine we can’t part with our phones for even a moment.

Contact with water also helps counter a dulled effect Nichols terms “gray mind.” Spending too much time inside, glued to screens, consuming news and entertainment, can lead to lethargy, lack of motivation, and dissatisfaction. Getting in, on, or near the water improves moods.

That said, even just looking at images of water makes people feel calmer, scientists find. Michael Depledge of the University of Exeter medical school in the UK and environmental psychologist Mat White conducted a wellbeing study involving photos with greenery and water. They began by showing subjects pictures of green environments slowly adding ponds lakes, and coasts. Subjects preferred environments with water. “We repeated that with urban scenes, from fountains in squares to canals running through the city, and once again people hugely preferred the urban environments with more water in them,” [Depledge told the Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/impact-sea-lakes-rivers-peoples-health%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). “Images with green space received a postive response, as Ulrich has found. But images with both green and blue got the most favourable response of all.”

So, if you can’t get to the beach, fear not; there are alternatives. Showering can change your mind for the better and boost creativity, for example. “The shower is a proxy for the…ocean,” Nichols told the [Huffington Post](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2016/02/25/mental-benefits-water_n_5791024.html). “You step in the shower, and you remove a lot of the visual stimulation of your day. Auditorially, it’s the same thing—it’s a steady stream of ‘blue noise.’ You’re not hearing voices or processing ideas. You step into the shower and it’s like a mini-vacation.”

That break gives your mind a little space to come up with creative ideas and to have epiphanies. Albert Einstein had his most [important realizations while sailing](https://qz.com/1299282/albert-einsteins-best-ideas-came-while-he-was-relaxing-aimlessly-yours-can-too/)—water taught him physics principles, and though he wasn’t much of a sailor, he spent as much time as possible in a boat. Meanwhile, Abraham Loeb writes in [Scientific American](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/where-do-ideas-come-from/)that many of his ideas come to him in the shower.

Michael Wenger, dean of Buddhist studies at the San Francisco Zen Center, recommends listening to water to clear the mind. He says that [flowing or moving water is ‘white noise](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200109/waters-wonders).’ Listening to the sound—allowing it to wash over you—is a meditative act that puts you in the moment.

**Awe for all**

“The use of sea and air is common to all; neither can a title to the ocean belong to any people or private persons, forasmuch as neither nature nor public use and custom permit any possession therof,” wrote Britain’s Queen Elizabeth in the 16th century. This remains true today.

Princes and paupers, scientists and scribes, presidents, and Queen Bey herself have all waxed poetic about the magical effects of water on the body and mind. “I’m always happy when I’m surrounded by water, I think I’m a mermaid,” pop goddess Beyonce Knowles plausibly admits. “The ocean makes me feel really small and it makes me put my whole life into perspective.”

The feeling Knowles describes—awe—has numerous health benefits. It’s [scientifically proven to calm](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/01/awesomeness-is-everything/508775/), content, temper egos, expand the sense of wonder and vastness, and make us more generous. This emotion is often induced in natural settings, like forests and oceans.

Research on the benefits of “green space”—forests and other green environments—has shown many health and wellness benefits. The Japanese practice of [forest bathing](https://qz.com/1208959/japanese-forest-medicine-is-the-art-of-using-nature-to-heal-yourself-wherever-you-are/), and study of the medicinal effects of just being among trees, has led to increased scientific interest on water’s effects as well.

“Until recently, research that has focused on the health benefits of nature has overlooked the *particular role of water*, or “blue space,” Nichols tells Quartz. “It is more important than ever as time spent in nature, especially when it involves the calming aspect of water, is a valuable way to offset the stresses of living and working in modern contexts.”

He notes, too, that discussions of green space and its benefits nonetheless connote water, which the Earth and all its creatures rely upon. “It’s no surprise that it’s called [forest ‘bathing,’](https://qz.com/804022/health-benefits-japanese-forest-bathing/) as water metaphors abound in our language, especially around emotional and mental wellness.”