

The Healing Power of the Ocean

The Positive Effects of Ocean Environments on Health and Wellbeing

Anja Ising¹, Zsófia Kerényi¹, Mariana Becker¹, Jelena Tomićević-Dubljević², Lena Lidfors³ & Anna María Pálsdóttir¹

¹Dept. of People and Society, Swedish University of Agricultural Science (SLU), Alnarp, Sweden

² Dept. of Landscape Architecture and Horticulture, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

³ Dept. of Applied Animal Science and Welfare SLU, Skara, Sweden

The international master's program, Outdoor Environments for Health and Well-Being, leads to a Master of Science degree specializing in environmental psychology. The program covers health-promoting outdoor environments throughout the lifespan, evidence-based health design, occupational aspects, and the One Health concept. One of the courses offered is *Nature and Animal-Assisted Interventions* (MP0009), which focuses on occupations, occupational performance, and values performed with natural elements and/or animals in indoor or outdoor settings, i.e., a place independent occupational performances for health promotion. This fact sheet is a final assignment of the student's work, presented at the NAAI course conference in 2024.

Keywords: Ocean Therapy, health and well-being, multi-sensory experience, nature-based interventions, embodied experience.

Introduction

Spending time near or in the ocean can help one disconnect from daily stress and reconnect with nature and oneself. Ocean therapy involves using seawater, its rich minerals and nutrients, the sensory-rich marine environments, and the coastal climate for therapeutic purposes.

The Sensory Experience of Ocean Environments and its Health Benefits

The multisensory experience of ocean environments, including visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory stimuli, can enhance psychological and physiological health and well-being. Visually, the vastness and blue hues of the ocean can promote relaxation and reduce stress levels. The rhythmic sound of waves can elevate auditory stimulation, inducing calmness, lowering heart rate, and reducing stress, anxiety, and depression levels while boosting mood, circulation, and respiratory functions. The distinct scent and taste of the sea, rich in negative ions and salt, can elevate mood and enhance respiratory function. The tactile sensation of water, whether through various water activities (e.g., swimming, surfing, scuba diving, or wading), can provide physical benefits such as improved circulation and muscle relaxation and boost

cardiovascular health and physical fitness. Being in or near seawater can elevate happiness, accelerate healing, and improve skin health due to its anti-inflammatory properties. Besides, the ocean can also be an antidote to an overstimulated and anxious "red" mind, as it can engage soft fascination, provide restoration, inspiration, and mental tranquility, and boost creativity and problem-solving abilities.

Ocean Therapy Approaches

Ocean therapy approaches can foster social interaction and reduce feelings of loneliness while physiologically lowering blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels. Activities can be done individually (e.g., beach meditation, swimming, beach walking) or in groups (e.g., surfing, kayaking, yoga), offering gradual challenges and active and passive engagement to suit all mental and physical abilities and capacities. By involving the body and mind in the water activities, the level of dopamine can increase, leading to the body acting as a self-healing pharmacy.

Conclusion

Ocean therapy, a nature-based intervention, can complement traditional medication and psychotherapy treatment, offering a unique therapeutic advantage that can foster a holistic health approach and improve overall quality of life.

The Healing Power of the Ocean

The Positive Effects of Ocean Environments on Health and Wellbeing

Background

How can ocean environments be used for therapeutic approaches in the purpose of health promotion and recovery?

Spending time near or in the ocean can disconnect from daily stress and helps to reconnect with nature and oneself. This concept aligns with biophilia or the human's connection to nature. Ocean therapy involves the use of seawater and its rich minerals and nutrients, marine environments and coastal climate for therapeutic purposes.

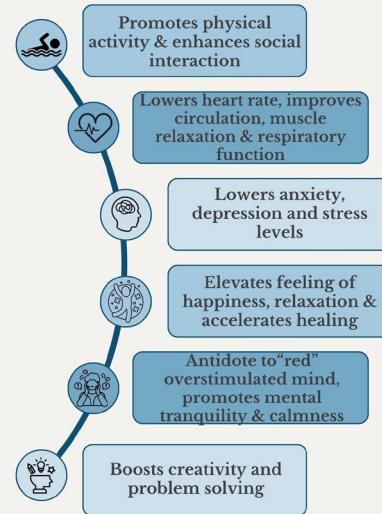
The Sensory Experience of Ocean Environments



Ocean environments can offer a multi-sensory experience for the body and mind which can enhance individuals' psychological and physiological health and wellbeing.

- The visual effects of vastness and blue hues of the ocean
- The rhythmic sounds of waves & auditory stimulation
- The tactile sensation of seawater
- The scent of sea breeze
- The taste of the seawater

Health Benefits of Being in or near the Ocean



Therapeutic Approaches - Ocean Therapy



Individual Approach & Activities

Beach meditation and mindfulness exercises, walking along shoreline, watching waves, swimming.



Group-based Approach & Activities

Surfing, kayaking, scuba diving.

Ocean therapy can be a complementary approach to traditional psychotherapy treatment as the multisensory ocean environment can offer a unique therapeutic advantage, advocating for a broader inclusion of water-based interventions to foster a holistic health approach and improve quality of life.



Anja Ising
Master Student
Environmental
Psychology
aaig0003@stud.slu.se



Mariana Becker
Master Student
Environmental
Psychology
maer0032@stud.slu.se



Zsófia Kerényi
Master Student
Environmental
Psychology
zsyi0001@stud.slu.se

SCIENCE AND EDUCATION
FOR SUSTAINABLE LIFE

