

# Green spaces reduce stress levels of jobless, study shows

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Stress levels of unemployed people are linked more to their surroundings than their age, gender, disposable income, and degree of deprivation, a study shows.

The presence of parks and woodland in economically deprived areas may help people cope better with [job losses](#), [post traumatic stress disorder](#), [chronic fatigue](#) and [anxiety](#), researchers say.

They found that people's [stress levels](#) are directly related to the amount of green space in their area – the more green space, the less stressed a person is likely to be.

Researchers measured stress by taking saliva samples from a group of 35-55 year olds in Dundee and gauging levels of cortisol – a hormone released in response to stress. They found that if less than 30 per cent of a person's surrounding area was green space, its population showed unhealthy levels of cortisol.

The study shows that for every one per cent increase in green space there was a corresponding steeper decline in stress levels. Where there is more green space, people tend to respond better to disruptive events, either by not getting as stressed in the first place or by coping better.

Participants were also asked to self-diagnose their stress levels and these results directly related to the percentage of local green space. People with more green space had lower levels of self-reported stress.

The research was led by the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt's OPENspace research centre, working with the Universities of Glasgow and Westminster. The James Hutton Institute was the project manager. The findings have been published in the journal *Landscape and Urban Planning*.

Catharine Ward Thompson, director of OPENspace research centre said: "Given the increasing levels of stress and poor mental health suffered by people in Scotland, this is an exciting breakthrough. For the first time, researchers have worked with unemployed people from deprived areas and used scientific tests to show that, where there is more green space around, people's stress levels were measurably lower, while less green space was linked with signs of the body's hormones not working properly."

Exercise was another factor found to reduce stress, but it may not be related to exercising in park land. People reported feeling less stressed if they lived in areas with more green space, regardless of how much exercise they did.

Provided by University of Edinburgh

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