

# How nature can alter our sense of time

March 26 2024, by Ruth Ogden and Jessica Thompson

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Do you ever get that feeling that there aren't enough hours in the day? That time is somehow racing away from you, and it is impossible to fit everything in. But then, you step outside into the countryside and suddenly everything seems slower, more relaxed, like time has somehow changed.

It's not just you—recent research showed nature can regulate our sense of time.

For many of us, the combined demands of work, home and family mean that we are always feeling like we don't [have enough time](#). Time poverty has also been exacerbated by [digital technologies](#). Permanent connectivity extends working hours and can make it difficult to switch off from the demands of friends and family.

[Recent research](#) suggests that the antidote to our lack of time may lie in the natural world. Psychologist Richardo Correia, at the University of Turku in Finland, found that being in nature may change how we experience time and, perhaps, even give us the sense of time abundance.

Correia examined research which compared people's experiences of time when they performed different types of tasks in urban and [natural environments](#). These studies consistently showed that people report a sense of expanded time when they were in nature compared to when they were in an [urban environment](#).

For example, people are more likely to perceive a walk in the [countryside as longer](#) than a walk of the same length in the city. Similarly, people report [perceiving time as passing](#) more slowly while performing tasks in natural green environments than in urban environments. Nature seems to slow and expand our sense of time.

It's not just our sense of time in the moment which appears to be altered by the natural world, it's also our sense of the past and future. Previous research shows that spending time in nature helps to shift our focus from the immediate moment towards our future needs. So rather than focusing on the stress of the demands on our time, nature helps us to [see the bigger picture](#).

This can help us to prioritize our actions so that we meet our [long-term goals](#) rather than living in a perpetual state of "just about keeping our head above water."

This is in part because spending time in nature appears to make us [less impulsive](#), enabling us to delay [instant gratification](#) in favor of long-term rewards.

## **Why does nature affect our sense of time?**

Spending time in nature is known to have many benefits for [health and well-being](#). Having access to natural spaces such as beaches, parks and woodlands is [associated with](#) reduced anxiety and depression, improved sleep, reduced levels of obesity and cardiovascular disease, and improved well-being.

Some of these benefits may explain why being in nature alters our experience of time.

The way we experience time [is shaped by](#) our internal biological state and the events going on in the world around us. As a result, emotions such as stress, anxiety and fear can distort our sense of the passage of time.

The relaxing effect of natural environments may counter stress and anxiety, resulting in a more stable experience of time. Indeed, the absence of access to nature during COVID-19 may help to explain why people's sense of time became so distorted during the [pandemic lockdowns](#).

In the short term, being away from the demands of modern day life may provide the respite needed to re-prioritize life, and reduce time pressure by focusing on what actually needs to be done. In the longer term, time

in nature may help to enhance our [memory and attention capacity](#), making us better able to deal with the demands on our time.

## Accessing nature

Getting out into nature may sound like a simple fix, but for many people, particularly those living in urban areas, nature can be hard to access. Green infrastructure such as trees, woodlands, parks and allotments in and around towns and cities are essential to making sure the [benefits of time](#) in nature are accessible to everyone.

If spending time in nature isn't possible for you, there are other ways that you can [regain control of your time](#). Start by closely examining how you use time throughout your week. Auditing your time can help you see where time is being wasted and to identify action to help you to free up more time in your life.

Alternatively, try to set yourself some boundaries in how you use time. This could be limiting when you access emails and [social media](#), or it could be booking in time in your calendar to take a break. Taking control of your time and how you use it can help to you overcome the [sense](#) that time is running away from you.

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