Spending 20 minutes with nature daily can improve mental health

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DO you know that spending just 20 minutes in a park can significantly reduce stress and improve mental state?

Data from the World Health Organisation (WHO) shows that about one in every eight people in the world lived with a mental health condition in 2019, with anxiety and depressive disorders being the most common.

According to a Time magazine article published online on Feb 28, 2019: "Spending time outdoors, especially in green spaces, is one of the fastest ways to improve your health and happiness. It's been shown to lower stress, blood pressure and heart rate while encouraging physical activity and buoying mood and mental health. Some research even suggests that green space is associated with a lower risk of developing psychiatric disorders."

Citing a study published in the International Journal of Environmental Health Research on Feb 13, 2019, the article noted that spending just 20 minutes in a park – even if you don't exercise while you're there – is enough to improve well-being.

Researchers surveyed 94 adults who visited one of three urban parks near Birmingham, Alabama, in the United States over the summer and autumn. They found that even though plenty of research suggests that exercise is great for mental health, simply sitting in a park is enough to relax the nerves.

In just 20 minutes, both your physical and mental health can feel the healing effects of nature.

Why 20 minutes? This is the shortest time scientists have found to be enough for the brain to break away from daily stress and begin to feel the natural recovery effect.

In an Oct 7, 2024 WWF (World Wildlife Fund) press release, Tanya Steele, its CEO, was quoted as saying: "Spending time in nature is proven to boost our wellbeing, whether it's taking a walk through your local park or woodland, watching the birds from your window or marvelling at a starry sky as the nights draw in.

"The evidence is clear – getting a daily dose of nature, even just for 20 minutes a day, can reduce anxiety and improve our mood, as well as making us more likely to take action to protect the health of our planet."

Our busy lives often make us forget the healing power of nature. The 20-minute park effect reminds us that simple contact with nature can bring huge health benefits. It can also help us find balance and tranquillity in our busy lives.