

The More Trees on Your Block, the Better Your Health

People intuitively understand that being around greenspace can be good for you especially in city environments. Urban trees are known to improve aesthetics, reduce energy consumption and improve air quality. But until a recent study reported in the Journal Nature, no one had examined whether the number of trees impacted the health of nearby residents. Now these findings have shown that the more trees on the street in urban neighborhoods, the better the residents perceived and medically reported health.

This important conclusion stems from the results of a massive, detailed study of local greenspace and inhabitants health in Toronto, Canada. Researchers mapped the city's foliage down to specific individual trees. They then analyzed how the amount of canopy cover impacted residents' perception of their own health as well as the number of cardiovascular and mental health conditions they reported as having. Data was collected from over 30,000 residents.

The data demonstrated that for every 10 trees added per block in a public space residents rated themselves as 1% healthier. For every eleven trees there was a 0.5% reduction in cardiovascular and metabolic disease. Notably the benefits were linked only to trees in public spaces, not private yards.

While these gains in health self-assessment and chronic conditions seem relatively small they are impactful for a number of reasons. First the degree of improvement in self-perception is the equivalent of feeling 7 year younger or having \$10,000 greater annual income. Likewise the reduction in chronic disease equates to being 1.4 years younger or a gain of \$20,000 in annual income. Additionally the benefits were found to be continuous and without a ceiling meaning that the more trees added the greater the benefit. Finally this study provides more evidence to support the benefits of added greenspace on mortality, morbidity, stress, blood pressure and healing.

Editorial: *This was an enormous study with an amazing amount of data. It sometimes takes this kind of scientific evidence to prove what we all know intuitively. Trees and nature are better for our health than concrete and pollution. As the world continues to be urbanized the lessons embodied in this study should be taken to heart.*

Bibliography

Neighborhood greenspace and health in a large urban center
Omid Kardan, Peter Gozdyra, Bratislav Mistic, Faisal Moola, Lyle J. Palmer, Tomáš Paus & Marc G. Berman; Nature, July 2015