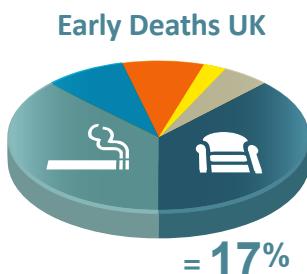




# Prescribing Green Space - *is it important?*

1 of 2



**Physical inactivity** now rivals smoking as one of the nation's biggest health problems and is responsible for 17% of early deaths in the UK.

## The Cost of physical inactivity:

The overall cost to the economy of physical inactivity in England is estimated to be £8.2 billion per year.<sup>i</sup> As a result the value of encouraging people to be active is huge, simply "reducing the sedentary population by one percent could reduce both morbidity and mortality rates at £1.44 billion a year".<sup>ii</sup>

If **Central Bedfordshire** encouraged 10% of its population to exercise through access to good quality green space it would save an estimated £2.9m in healthcare costs.<sup>iii</sup>



An inactive person spends 37% more days in hospital



and visits the doctor 5.5% more often.<sup>iv</sup>



GPs understand the benefits of exercise but there are barriers to prescribing it<sup>v</sup>.

**Green space** has huge benefits to both physical and mental health<sup>vi</sup> and also significant social benefits.<sup>vii</sup>

**Being in green space** can improve mood and result in a decrease in blood pressure and muscle tension.<sup>ix</sup>

The availability of good quality green space in a neighbourhood can lead to higher physical activity levels and people living in close proximity to good quality green spaces enjoy better health and live longer.<sup>x</sup>

**Improving access** to and use of green space can help to reduce health inequalities in key priority health areas.<sup>xi</sup>



**Exercising outdoors** in natural and green spaces is more beneficial to health and wellbeing than indoor exercise.<sup>viii</sup>



**Green space** is important for prevention and for reducing rates of some chronic diseases: e.g. trees improve air quality and asthma rates in children are found to be lower when there is more tree cover.<sup>xii</sup>

**Physical activity** can offer benefits to those receiving cancer treatments and can reduce the likelihood of breast and bowel cancer reoccurring.<sup>xiii</sup>

## Green Prescriptions

6-8 months after receiving their green prescription, 63% of patients are more active than they were before and 46% have lost weight.<sup>xiv</sup>

### Lose Weight



To find out more about green prescriptions contact:  
The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare - [info@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk](mailto:info@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk)

[www.nhsforest.org](http://www.nhsforest.org)



CENTRE for  
SUSTAINABLE  
HEALTHCARE  
inspire • empower • transform



# Prescribing Green Space - *is it important?*

2 of 2

## References

<sup>i</sup> Allender, S. Foster, C. Scarborough, P. Rayener, M. 2007, 'The burden of physical activity-related ill health in the UK'. *J. Epidemiol Community Health*, 2007, 61:344 – 348 ('No charge? Valuing the natural environment', Natural England 2009 -[www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications))

<sup>ii</sup> 2005 CJC Consulting, Willis, K., Osman, L., 2005. 'Economic benefits of accessible green spaces for physical and mental health: scoping study'. Forestry Commission

<sup>iii</sup> There are 4 million households in England and Wales and 264,500 households in Central Bedfordshire. If every household in England were provided with good access to quality green space it could save an estimated £2.1 billion in health care costs. If Central Bedfordshire encouraged 10% of its population to exercise through access to good quality green space it would save an estimated £2.9m in healthcare costs. Taken from 'Natural Fit', Dr William Bird, 2004

<sup>iv</sup> Sari N. Physical inactivity and its impact on healthcare utilization. *Health Econ* 2009, 18:885–901

<sup>v</sup> Research by the Mental Health Foundation found that 42% of GPs would try exercise as one of their top three strategies if they themselves became depressed but only 5% prescribe exercise to their patients.[ref (Up and Running, © Mental Health Foundation 2005)]

<sup>vi</sup> Two reports, sponsored by RSPB, published in 2004 and 2007 outlined the benefits to physical and mental health arising from contact with the natural environment. These included the reductions in obesity, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stress, ADHD, aggression and criminal activity, amongst others.  
Bird, W (2004) 'Natural Fit', RSPB - [www.rspb.org.uk/Images/natural\\_fit\\_full\\_version\\_tcm9-133055.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/natural_fit_full_version_tcm9-133055.pdf)  
Bird, W (2007) 'Natural Thinking', RSPB - [www.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking\\_tcm9-161856.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking_tcm9-161856.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Participation in a range of green exercise activities leads to significant health and social benefits. Self-esteem levels are significantly improved and feelings of anger, confusion, depression and tension all significantly improve post-activity. Pretty J, Griffin M, Peacock J, Hine R, Sellens M and South N. 2005

<sup>viii</sup> Jules Pretty, Murray Griffin, Jo Peacock, Rachel Hine, Martin Sellens and Nigel South 2005, A countryside for Health and Well-Being: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise, Countryside Recreation Network

<sup>ix</sup> Van den Berg, A.E., Koole S.L., and van der Wulp N.Y. (2003). 'Environmental preferences and restoration: (how) are they related?' *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 23, 135-146

<sup>x</sup> 'Natural Solutions for Tackling Health Inequalities', Jessica Allen and Reuben Balfour UCL Institute of Health Equity

<sup>xi</sup> This report includes lots of useful case studies. 'Natural Solutions for Tackling Health Inequalities', Jessica Allen and Reuben Balfour, UCL Institute of Health Equity

<sup>xii</sup> Columbia University researchers found asthma rates among children aged four and five fell by a quarter for every additional 343 trees per square kilometre. Lovasi, G., Quinn, J., Neckerman, K., Perzanowski, M. & Rundle, A. (2008) 'Children living in areas with more street trees have lower prevalence of asthma.' *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 62(7), pp. 647-649

<sup>xiii</sup> Macmillan Cancer Support (2011), 'The importance of physical activity for people living with and beyond cancer: A concise evidence review'

<sup>xiv</sup> Dose of Nature Evidence report, Dan Bloomfield 2014  
<http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/physical-activity/green-prescriptions/green-prescription-research/green-prescription-patient-survey>

To find out more about green prescriptions contact: The Centre for Sustainable Healthcare - [info@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk](mailto:info@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk)  
[www.nhsforest.org](http://www.nhsforest.org)