

# Fact Sheet

## Parks and Physical Health

Parks and green spaces play an important role in building healthier and more physically active communities. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that spending time in green spaces can influence positive health outcomes by helping to mitigate risk factors for chronic diseases through lowering stress hormone levels, boosting our immune response and supporting maintenance of a healthy weight.

### Physical Health in modern society

There are numerous [studies](#) demonstrating the important role of physical activity in the prevention and management of risk factors for chronic health issues such as cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, obesity, hypertension and type 2 diabetes. [Australian statistics](#) have demonstrated that the incidence and prevalence of physical inactivity and related health issues are on the rise, with less than a third of Australians aged 15 years and over getting enough physical activity to benefit their health, and only 19% of 5-17 year-olds meeting the recommended physical activity guidelines.

Good physical health is also important in supporting positive mental health and wellbeing. Studies have [demonstrated](#) that regular physical exercise can improve mood, reduce stress, improve sleep and increase energy and mental alertness.

### Parks and nature are part of the solution

Scientific [studies](#) have shown that spending time in nature can have a positive impact on physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. Evidence [demonstrates](#) that exercising in natural settings has a more positive effect on perceived mental and physical health than indoor exercise and is identified by participants as more enjoyable. It has been [found](#) that exercising in green spaces can improve physical and mental health more than exercise in other environments and has been shown to increase the likelihood of participants maintaining a long-term routine of exercise. Exercise in green spaces also has the added benefit of providing opportunities for [social connection](#) as a part of the physical exercise.

The physical, mental and social benefits of exercise in green spaces have [been shown](#) to span all age groups and demographics. Studies have shown that exercise in natural settings can improve mood and decrease stress in [teens](#) and [older adults](#). It has also been demonstrated to lower inflammatory [immune responses](#).

As such, exercising in natural settings can be an important part of every community member's health plan. Parks and reserves have the potential to offer a multitude of physical activities that can be done both individually and, in a group setting. Many operators offer outdoor activities for people with a range of health issues and fitness levels. Gentle exercise such as guided walks, tai chi, yoga, forest bathing and volunteering activities can assist those experiencing illness or injury to slowly improve their physical fitness. More challenging options such as hiking, outdoor boot camps and cycling can assist those with fitness goals to reach them through incorporating nature-based

activities into their weekly routines. Whether your goal is to improve your strength and mobility, or increase your aerobic fitness or flexibility, there is an activity to suit every interest and age group.



Image credit: Parks Victoria

### Next steps

Victoria's national, state and urban parks and waterways provide perfect settings for our community to improve their physical health and wellbeing across all life stages. Some park-based activities that should be considered include:

**Park walks:** organised guided walks in a park are a great way to support people to improve their health in a relaxing nature-based setting. There are volunteer-led walks for all abilities on offer in locations throughout Victoria.

**Volunteering:** there are volunteer activities for every age group, skill and ability type, where members of the public can experience the health benefits of spending time in nature.

**Organised outdoor activities:** Parks Victoria can connect you to a range of outdoor activities that can benefit your health and meet the physical activity and recreational goals for all fitness levels, such as biking, canoeing, sailing and bushwalking.

Visit [www.parks.vic.gov.au](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au) to find a park near you

- [Find out about guided Park walks](#)
- [Find volunteering opportunities in parks](#)
- [Find out about outdoor activities in parks](#)
- [Health professional resources and tools](#)

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment