

Need to reduce work-related stress? It's a walk in the park

13 January 2021



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Work causes so much stress that it's become a global public health issue. The impact of stress on mental and physical health can also hurt productivity and result in economic loss. A new study now finds that working people who regularly take walks in forests or green spaces may have higher stress-coping abilities.

In a study published in *Public Health in Practice*, researchers led by Professor Shinichiro Sasahara at the University of Tsukuba analyzed workers' "sense of coherence" (SOC) scores, demographic attributes and their forest/green space walking habits. SOC comprises the triad of meaningfulness (finding a sense of meaning in life), comprehensibility (recognizing and understanding [stress](#)), and manageability (feeling equipped to deal with stress). Studies have found factors such as [higher education](#) and being married can strengthen SOC, while smoking and lack of exercise can weaken it. People with strong SOC also have greater resilience to stress.

The study used [survey data](#) on more than 6,000 Japanese workers between 20 and 60 years old. It

found stronger SOC among people who regularly took walks in forests or [green spaces](#).

"SOC indicates mental capacities for realizing and dealing with stress," Professor Sasahara says. "With workplace stress as a focal issue, there's a clear benefit in identifying [everyday activities](#) that raise SOC. It seems we may have found one."

People find comfort in nature, and in countries like Japan, urban green spaces are increasing in popularity where nature isn't readily accessible. This means many workers in cities can easily take a walk among the trees.

The researchers divided the survey respondents into four groups based on their frequency of forest/green space walking. Then, they compared their walking activity against attributes such as age, income and [marital status](#), and with the respondents' SOC scores, which were grouped as weak, middle, and strong.

Those with strong SOC showed a significant correlation with both forest and green space walking at least once a week. This key finding implies the greater benefits of urban greening—not just environmental, but also socioeconomic.

"Our study suggests that taking a walk at least once a week in a forest or green space can help people have stronger SOC," explains Professor Sasahara. "Forest/green space walking is a simple activity that needs no special equipment or training. It could be a very good habit for improving mental health and managing stress."

More information: T. Ikeda et al, Association between forest and greenspace walking and stress-coping skills among workers of Tsukuba Science City, Japan: A cross-sectional study, *Public Health in Practice* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.puhip.2020.100074](#)

Provided by University of Tsukuba

APA citation: Need to reduce work-related stress? It's a walk in the park (2021, January 13) retrieved 4 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-work-related-stress.html>

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