



# Ecotherapy

## What you can do

### Discover your breathing space

Get out into the open air of a park or the countryside for some therapeutic exercise.

### Join a local community group

Feel a sense of achievement by working with people on a horticultural project, tidying up public parks or simply strolling through woodland.

### Get into nature

Local nature conservation activities are the new green gyms. Projects include the creation of community gardens, management of local woodlands, tree planting and maintenance of public footpaths. Enjoy the natural and social connections, sensory stimulation, activity and escape that green exercise activities offer.

### Find your green space

Green space improves mental wellbeing, mood and motivation; reduces feelings of anger, stress, depression and tension; provides a restorative environment for people to relax, unwind and recharge their batteries; and facilitates social contact by bringing people together.

### Mood food

Correct food and nutrition positively impact on mental as well as physical health. Eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables as part of a healthy diet. Experiment with planting your own vegetables.

## Mind

Mind, the leading mental health charity in England and Wales, works to create a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress by:

- advancing peoples views, needs, and ambitions
- challenging discrimination and promoting inclusion
- influencing policy and achieving equal rights through campaigning and educating
- inspiring the development of quality services which reflect expressed need and diversity
- providing information and support.

Mind's vision is of a society that treats people with experience of mental distress fairly, positively and with respect. Mind has long campaigned for people to have access to alternative treatments and promotes the therapeutic and social benefits of physical activities.

## Ecominds

Ecominds, a £7.5 million open grant scheme run by Mind, will benefit around 125 new and existing projects throughout England focusing on mental health and the environment.

Ecominds aims to reduce the stigma surrounding mental distress by helping people with direct experience of mental distress become involved in environmental projects that improve mental and physical health, and local communities.

**Improve your mental health with ecotherapy**

## Ecominds

For more information about what you can do for your mental health, visit [www.ecominds.org.uk](http://www.ecominds.org.uk)

To read a pdf of the *Ecotherapy* report go to <http://www.mind.org.uk/mindweek2007/report/>



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**For better mental health**





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## Mental health facts

- One in four people will experience mental distress during their lifetime.
- Anyone can be affected, even children.

Every year in England mental distress costs £77 billion.

For every 1,000 people:

- 300 will experience mental health problems
- 230 will visit a GP as a result
- 102 will be diagnosed with a mental health problem
- 24 will be referred to a specialist psychiatric service
- six will become inpatients in psychiatric hospitals.

Over 4,000 people take their own lives each year.

The World Health Organization predicts depression will be the second greatest cause of ill health globally by 2020.

**Kensington and Chelsea Mind reap the benefits of ecotherapy at their Meanwhile Wildlife Garden:**

“Working with plants is very rewarding, it brings a sense of pleasure and purpose. People feel safe and calm in the garden and leave with a sense of wellbeing.”

## Mental health and the environment

Green exercise provides substantial benefits for health and wellbeing. Ecotherapy is a complementary therapy that is proven to benefit mental health, enrich quality of life and reduce vulnerability to depression.

Physical activities such as walking, gardening, and exercise help lift mood, develop motivation, raise self-esteem, reduce stress, and provide purpose and meaning. Contacts formed with other people during outdoor activities can reduce isolation, help develop support networks and improve social skills.

Many community mental health support groups already use horticultural and similar schemes to support people with mental health problems to develop life skills, coping strategies, undertake training, achieve qualifications and pursue employment opportunities.



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## Ecotherapy

Ecotherapy is an important form of treatment that involves patients taking advantage of the great outdoors. It is natural, cheap and has only positive side-effects. Recommendations from Mind's 2007 *Ecotherapy* report include:

- ecotherapy should be regarded as a clinically valid treatment for mental distress
- GPs should consider referral for green exercise as a treatment option for every patient experiencing mental distress
- making access to green space a key issue in all care planning and care assessment
- designing for mental wellbeing should be recognised as good practice for architecture and town and country planning
- addressing inequality of access to green space as a human rights, social justice and discrimination issue
- the requirement that all health, social care and criminal justice institutions ensure access to green space
- public health campaigns should promote the benefits of green exercise
- information should be available in GP surgeries.

Mind's ecotherapy research confirms the benefits of green exercise activities for health and wellbeing, and that a greener, cleaner lifestyle aids positive changes to mental health.

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