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**Listen Up!**  
**Rejuvenation Exercise**

Rejuvenating Communities One Moment at a Time



# **Tuning into nature sounds will decrease your stress levels and restore your attention and focus.**

**This exercise takes 3-7 between minutes.**

Step 1: Find a place with natural sounds: Bird song, wind or moving water.

Step 2: Let your body relax.

Step 3: Notice the sounds in six directions: to your left and right, front and back, up and down (some people prefer to close their eyes).

Step 4: Now that your ears are turned on, let's make a sound map. Notice where the quiet areas are. Now notice where the noisy areas are. Imagine the landscape as a sound-map in your mind. A soundscape!

Step 5: Sound is present in the landscape for a reason. Ask yourself why some places on your sound-map are quiet and others louder. For example, the trees are noisy because they are high enough to catch the wind, there is a road behind you and the traffic is busy, the sports field area is quiet because nobody is playing.

Stay with the sounds as long as you like but aim between 3 -7 minutes.

## **How Will It Make You Feel?**

Getting to know and connecting with your place is proven to increase your wellbeing, vitality and life satisfaction. Tuning into nature sounds (as opposed to other sounds) will decrease your stress levels and restore your attention and focus.

## **Learn more on the benefits of this exercise:**

### **Nature Sounds and Mental Wellbeing**

Researchers at Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) conducted an experiment where participants listened to sounds recorded from natural and artificial environments, while their brain activity was measured in an MRI scanner and their autonomic nervous system activity was monitored via minute changes in heart rate (Gould van Praag et al. 2017).

The researchers found that when listening to natural sounds, the brain connectivity reflected an outward directed focus of attention; when listening to artificial sounds, the brain connectivity reflected an inward directed focus of attention, similar to states observed in anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression

There was also an increase in rest-digest nervous system activity (associated with relaxation of the body) and better performance in an external attentional monitoring tasks.

Other research has found a benefit from listening to nature sounds for:

- Sleep and insomnia, (Nasari, Ghezeljeh, and Haghani 2018).
- Restoration and stress recovery (after listening to bird sound) (Ratcliffe, Gatersleben, and Sowden 2013; Alvarsson, Wiens, and Nilsson 2010; Ferraro et al., 2020).
- Reduction in muscle tension (after less than 7 minutes of nature sounds) (Largo-Wight, O'Hara, and Chen 2016).
- Reductions in anxiety after heart operations (based on clinical trials) (Amiri, Sadeghi, and Negahban Bona-bi 2017).

Brief nature sound (less than 7 minute) "booster breaks" are a promising area for future research with important practical implications.

## Nature Sounds, Placemaking and Connection

Sounds provide a specific kind of information over and above the visual which helps enhance and emphasise the different components of the environment. Sound is present in the landscape for a reason. Think of it as 'absence and abundance'. If it is silent, that might mean there is an absence of things that people, plants and animals need: shelter, food, water, protection, pathways, social contact and so on. If it is noisy, what is there to make it so? Connecting with the soundscape activates the biophilic and belonging aspects of 'placemaking'. Placemaking, being a planning framework known to improve personal and social wellbeing (Jack 2015; Fuller et al. 2016). Multiple studies have also found that nature sounds (especially water) increase peoples pleasure of place, even when viewing urban settings.(Carles, Barrio, and de Lucio 1999).

Making a soundmap connects people the underlying natural and human ecology of place. In a meta-review of the nature wellbeing literature Capaldi, Dopko, and Zelenski (2014) found: "those who are more connected to nature tended to experience more positive affect, vitality, and life satisfaction compared to those less connected to nature"

### What type of nature:

It is important to match this exercise with optimal types of nature. The ideal location for this exercise should be in areas where urban sounds are minimal because research shows people prefer natural sounds over artificial sounds (Carles, Barrio, and de Lucio 1999). However, our experience is that this exercise will work in urban areas provided some nature sounds are present such as birds singing, running water, wind in the trees, and pleasant human background sounds. The ability to hear water (even distantly) is particularly pleasurable and bird sound particularly stress relieving (Ratcliffe, Gatersleben, and Sowden 2013). A review of 26,000 European residents found that bird diversity is correlated with life satisfaction, and that increasing bird diversity has comparable effects on wellbeing to increasing wealth (Methorst et.al 2020). Finally, some areas of silence are beneficial to this activity. They provide contrast in the landscape and curiosity in the mind of the user. Regular uses of this exercise will start to notice that sounds are not only in the place for a reason but some sounds, especially the sounds of birds, can become quite repetitive in terms of time of day when you hear them and the specific location of the sound source.

### Try using your kangaroo ears:

Upgrade the sound map experience using kangaroo ears!

Did you know that kangaroos can turn their ears to listen in several directions at once? Take on the form of a kangaroo and cup your hands around your ears to make them more sensitive. Face your hands forwards, now face them backwards. Now try facing one hand forward and one backwards. Notice the difference in sound?



**Now you know more about this exercise and where to best use it. Scan this QR Code any time you want Listen Up! (to access the audio instructions)**



## References & Further Readings:

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