

"It's more than a learning and teaching campus. It's a place that actively supercharges student and staff wellbeing!"

Associate Professor Kate Lloyd,
Macquarie University

go
slow
for a
mo'

Living Lab Program

The Living Lab Go Slow for a Mo' research program at Macquarie University continues to design, test and evaluate nature connection activities working with students and staff across all faculties. Additionally, the research team is conducting a national survey and interview program to better understand how people use and value their outdoor places while exploring the applications of the Go-Slow program for medical 'green prescriptions' within a local context.

The Go Slow for a Mo' team also tracks the latest empirical interdisciplinary research emerging from around the world showing that meaningful connections with nature improves:

- Attention, focus, mood, and creativity
- Blood pressure, pain control, immune function, diabetes mitigation
- Stress levels, depression, anxiety, sleep, and resilience
- Respect and appreciation for the natural environment (and 'place')
- Behaviours in addressing climate change and sustainability
- Greater overall happiness, wellbeing and life satisfaction
- Feelings of gratitude and care for oneself and their community

The Macquarie University Living Lab Go Slow trail has been designed to target mental restoration and repair. This digital trail takes students and staff through six rejuvenation stations aimed at increasing positive mood, emotional regulation, attention restoration and support greater resilience to anxiety and stress.

go
slow
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<- trail rejuvenation
exercise stations

Backed by research

A body of research too large to ignore^{1 2} is confirming what we have all known for a long time; nature has a profound effect on our wellbeing. However, research demonstrates that our interaction with nature needs to be more than ‘just a walk in the park’. To access and amplify the health benefits of nature, the types of activities we do in nature matter more than the amount of time spent. The psychological measures of how connected we are to nature, commonly known (or termed) as nature connectedness, now considered to be an important indicator of wellbeing. It is also significantly correlated with increases in pro-social and pro-environmental behaviours.

Living Lab Trail Rejuvenation Station - six short sensory exercises

(1) Breathe Slowly (2) Listen Up! (3) Relax the Eyes (4) Sensory Switch (5) The Tree & Me (6) Beautiful Things

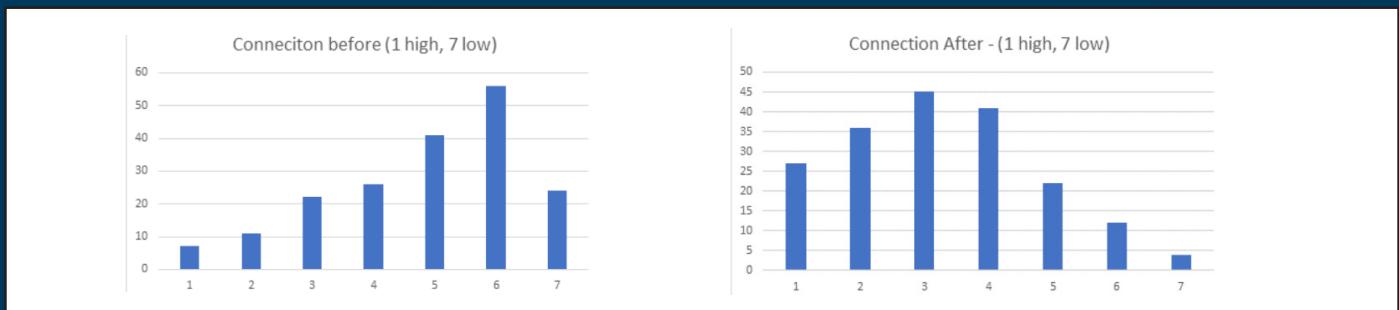


Rejuvenation Activity Benefits	Nature Contact Benefits
Breathe Slowly: Abdominal breathing exercise to increase pleasantness, vigour, alertness, and reduces symptoms of anxiety, depression, anger and confusion. ³	Inhaling negative ions from running water and sunlight improves relaxation, boosts immunity and metabolism. ⁴
Listen Up!: This listening exercise breaks sensory habits to increase connection with nature and also includes a placemaking element.	Listening to nature sounds restores attention and reduces muscle tension faster and more effectively than listening to urban sounds. ^{5 6}
Relax The Eyes: MRI and EEG scans show that peripheral vision stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system leading to feelings, mindfulness and calm awareness. ⁷ Using peripheral vision in nature creates feelings of awe.	Using peripheral vision in nature enhances stress reduction and restoration through ‘soft fascination’ a key component of attention restoration theory. ⁸ Experiencing awe of nature increases wellbeing and community spirit. ⁹
Sensory Switch: This exercise uses sensory experiences to create moments for pausing, stopping and noticing nature in difference ways.	Sensory engagement with nature has well documented beneficial effects on connection mental restoration, calm and creativity. ¹⁰
The Tree & Me: This mimicry exercise is used to trigger mirror neurons to creates empathy and compassion. This exercise helps to create a stronger connection between the person and the place.	Standing near trees increases access to phytoncides, adiponectin and anti cancer T-cells. ¹¹ Looking up and out on nature has a range of neurological benefits. ¹²
Beautiful Things: This exercise helps individuals to notice and enjoy beautiful things.	Noticing the beauty of nature has a particular effect on increasing pro-community behaviours such as agreeableness, friendship and helping behaviours ¹³ ; it is also a driver of nature connection which is linked to overall increases in life satisfaction. ¹⁴

"I came away with an increased appreciation of the incredible power that nature can have on my wellbeing - lowering my stress levels, increasing relaxation. It had a profound effect on me."

Eleni Gorgas, Medical Student
Macquarie University

Go Slow for a Mo' @ Home Program increasing nature connectedness



Self-evaluation using validated nature-inclusion scale (INS). 7=low connection, 1=very high connection



Students increased their nature connectedness score (INS) by 31%. From an averaged 13 minute Go-Slow sessions three times a week students felt:

- 50 % more relaxed
- 36 % happier
- 20 % less negative
- 31 % more connected
- 20% more appreciative of place



Why is this important?

Living Lab research word association
(dataset 400+ 2021)

Increasing nature connectedness – ‘tuning nature in’ helps to:

1. Tune anxiety and depression out¹⁵
2. Increases overall life satisfaction (4 x greater than an increase in socio economic status).¹⁶
3. Increase actions on climate change and conservation behaviours.^{17 18}
4. Increase the care for others and the community.¹³
5. Support a greater resilience to disasters and faster disaster recovery.¹⁹

Listen to our stories:

Hear what student participants are saying about Go Slow for a Mo'
[\[www.vimeo.com/527611875\]](https://www.vimeo.com/527611875)

Learn more:

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