

New Study: A 15-Minute 'Awe Walk' Kills Stress and Loneliness and Boosts Happiness By [Jessica Stillman@EntryLevelRebel](#)

Make just a little time for awe in your life, and a new study suggests you'll see big benefits.

Everyone knows [exercise improves your mood and your health](#). You may have also heard that exercising [in nature](#) has even greater benefits, such as reducing stress and working to [help keep your brain young](#).

But new research suggests adding a third element to the cocktail of physical activity plus the great outdoors leads to an even greater payoff. And handily for time-strapped entrepreneurs, you need only 15 minutes a week to see these benefits.

What's this secret ingredient for the ultimate health boost? Awe.

Just 15 minutes a week can boost your mental health.

Awe is the feeling of smallness and wonder you experience when you stand before something vastly bigger than you. It's what astronauts feel when they look down at Earth from space or the rest of us feel looking up at the countless stars in the night sky. A significant body of psychology research shows [awe helps us feel less anxious, more connected, and generally happier](#).

But while awe is great for our mental health, it's also easy to lose touch with the feeling in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. [A recent study](#) led by Virginia Strum of the University of California, San Francisco set out to test a dead simple intervention to reintroduce awe into everyday life -- awe walks.

The team recruited 52 older adults and divided them randomly into two groups. All the participants were told to go on a weekly 15-minute walk outdoors, but half the volunteers got additional instructions explaining the benefits of awe and urging them to seek out new places that might produce the feeling.

Volunteers didn't need to venture into wild mountain landscapes or take long moody walks by the sea. The researchers suggested that simply taking the time to notice everyday beauty, from the play of light on a drop of rain to the subtle colors of fall foliage, could produce the feeling.

Throughout the study the researchers monitored the participants' moods and also asked them to record their walks with [selfies](#).

When the team compared the two groups after eight weeks, they found significant differences. Unsurprisingly the awe group reported experiencing more awe, but over time they experienced more of other positive emotions too.

"They also felt more socially connected, and reported bigger increases in positive emotions -- including prosocial emotions such as gratitude and compassion, and also joy -- while they were walking. The boost in prosocial emotions, specifically, carried through into everyday life. Daily distress also decreased more over time in the awe group," [reports the British Psychological Society Research Digest blog](#).

The researchers also noticed that, in the selfies from the awe walks, the volunteers themselves took up less of the frame and the landscape more. This suggests (though doesn't prove) that awe does indeed help us get out of our heads and gain a healthy perspective on our own smallness compared to a universe packed with wonders.

How to go on an awe walk

There are a couple of caveats to these findings -- the volunteers were all over 60, so it's possible younger people wouldn't get the same benefits, for example -- but it's also true that a 15-minute awe walk is easy and has no downsides. The worst that could happen is you get a little fresh air and exercise.

So if you're looking for a way to kill stress, boost joy, and feel more connected to your fellow humans (and who isn't at the moment?), then try scheduling a short trip to somewhere new and potentially awe-inspiring each week. [The Greater Good Science Center has detailed instructions](#) in how to approach the outing (as well as alternative destinations for city dwellers).

Try out an awe walk this week and hopefully you'll come home feeling both much smaller and much calmer.