



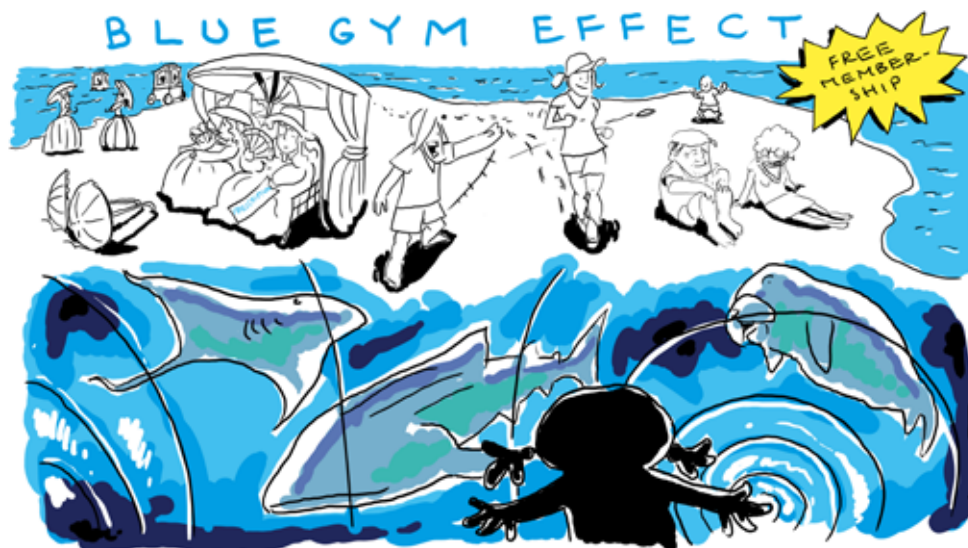
The Sea and our Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Spending time by the sea has long been associated with health benefits and a sense of wellbeing. Acknowledging the importance of the sea's influence on our mental and physical health, the Blue Gym concept refers to using the coastal environment specifically to promote health and wellbeing by increasing physical activity, reducing stress and building stronger communities.

To continue benefitting from the Blue Gym effect for our own health, we must keep our marine environment clean and healthy.

» UNRAVELLING THE BLUE GYM EFFECT

- More feelings of restoration (i.e. feeling calm, relaxed, revitalized and refreshed) are recalled by individuals after visits to coastal environments compared to rural/countryside environments and urban green/open spaces.
- Families in Southwest England emphasized that the key health benefits they experienced from living in coastal regions were psychological, including experiencing fun, stress relief and engagement with nature. Other benefits indicated were increased social and family interaction and encouragement to be physically active.
- Populations living near the English coast have higher levels of self-reported health than those living inland. The positive effects of coastal proximity were greater amongst more socio-economically deprived communities, indicating that access to 'good' environments may play a part in reducing health inequalities.
- A laboratory study found that higher restorativeness was associated with pristine rather than littered coastal scenes. This demonstrates that the presence of marine litter can undermine the psychological benefits that the coast provides and that as well as the environmental costs of marine litter, there are also costs to people.



» EXPERIENCE THE BLUE GYM EFFECT FOR YOURSELF

Walk by the sea: Coastal walking is the single most popular activity which connects people to the sea.

Visit an aquarium: Spending time in aquariums has been shown to have positive effects on mood, heart rate and blood pressure.

Leave only footprints: Take your litter home with you when you visit the beach.

» FUTURE BLUE GYM RESEARCH

- **Mechanisms of the Blue Gym effect:** Future research seeks to uncover the mechanisms by which positive health benefits are conferred. For example, could lower levels of air pollution in coastal areas be part of the explanation for the positive health effects observed?
- **Using Blue Gym for Healthcare:** The de-stressing properties of the Blue Gym effect are being investigated for use in healthcare through the use of virtual reality. In a study simulating dental experiences, people felt (and recalled) less pain when "at" the virtual beach (the virtual reality environment used is displayed on the back of this page).
- **Healthcare Savings:** The translation of the Blue Gym effect into healthcare savings is beginning to be investigated. Exercising outside offers benefits in treating or even avoiding the onset of obesity, depression and many other conditions currently on the rise. Taking the healthcare savings and societal benefits of physical activities in the marine environment into account alongside the need for local economic growth could influence marine spatial planning in terms of improving coastal access and water quality.

» TOURISM IS INFLUENCED BY THE BLUE GYM EFFECT

- The positive effect of coastal environments on human health and wellbeing and the preference of many people to spend their leisure time at the coast has resulted in the coastal and maritime tourism sector representing over one third of Europe's maritime economy.
- 'Sea' and 'view' combined are considered to be the two most 'expensive' words in the English language, referring to the fact that people are willing to pay more for homes and hotel rooms with sea views.
- Coastal and maritime tourism is listed as one of the five focus areas for delivering sustainable growth and jobs as part of Europe's Blue Growth strategy. The strategy acknowledges that high quality bathing waters and pristine coastal and marine habitats have a high recreation value.



Find out more about initiatives you can get involved in and the everyday actions you can take by visiting the Sea Change website.



Key Information Sources and Further Reading

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A virtual reality environment used in a study simulating dental experiences and people's recollection of pain (Tanja-Dijkstra et al., 2014).

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