

## Doctors are prescribing nature to patients in the UK's Shetland Islands

By Tara John, CNN

Updated 10:16 AM ET, Fri October 5, 2018



*Now all 10 of the Shetland Islands' public surgeries will now have a calendar and leaflet listing walks and activities.*

(CNN) Long walks, bird-watching and making daisy chains are being prescribed by doctors to patients in Scotland's Shetland Islands as part of treatments for chronic illnesses.

On Friday, National Health Service Shetland rolled out what has been billed as "nature prescriptions" to help treat a range of afflictions, including high blood pressure, anxiety and depression.

All 10 of the county's public surgeries will now have a calendar and leaflet listing walks and activities, made by the Royal Society of Birds Scotland (RSPB Scotland), that doctors can hand out to patients, according to an RSPB news release.

All 10 of the county's public surgeries will now have a calendar and leaflet listing walks and activities, made by the Royal Society of Birds Scotland (RSPB Scotland), that doctors can hand out to patients, according to an RSPB news release.

The calendar, available online, encourages patients to comb beaches for shells, do some gardening, take a coastal walk or even search for otters during low tide in order to reap the health benefits of the outdoors.

"Through the 'Nature Prescriptions' project GPs [doctors] and nurses can explain and promote the many benefits which being outdoors can have on physical and mental well-being," Lauren Peterson, health improvement practitioner for NHS Shetland, said in a statement.



Living near nature linked to longer lives, says study

The calendar, [available online](#), encourages patients to comb beaches for shells, do some gardening, take a coastal walk or even search for otters during low tide in order to reap the health benefits of the outdoors.

[Research has shown](#) that exposure to nature can counter depression, decrease stress levels, improve blood pressure and it has also been shown to boost creative and cognitive abilities.



[\*Why you should be forest bathing \(and we don't mean shampoo\)\*](#)

A 2017 study by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston [found that living in, or near, green areas](#) can help women live longer and improve their mental health.

This is what Shetland Island doctors are trying to exploit.

"I want to take part because the project provides a structured way for patients to access nature as part of a non-drug approach to health problems," Dr. Chloe Evans, a general practitioner at a health center in the island, said in a statement.

"The benefits to patients are that it is free, easily accessible, allows increased connection with surroundings which hopefully leads to improved physical and mental health for individuals," said Evans, whose practice first piloted the initiative last year.

Public and private initiatives around the world have moved in a similar direction. In the US, a project by the East Bay Regional Park District and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland ferries patients to parks through their "park prescription and nature shuttle" program.

"Studies have shown that within 15 minutes of being in nature, your stress level goes down, your heart rate, blood pressure improves," said Dr. Nooshin Razani, a pediatrician and nature researcher with UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland, in a previous report.

"Over the course of a lifetime," she said, "being in nature can lead to less heart disease, as well as improvements in how long people can live."