



## QUICKFACTS

### The Health Benefits of Parks and Recreation

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Park and recreation services play a vital role in creating active and healthy communities. However, your community leaders may not be aware of the direct contribution that parks and recreation play in shaping community health. Here are some facts that can be used to convey the health and physical activity benefits of parks and recreation. These facts are the result rigorous scientific studies across different age groups, communities, and across a variety of park and recreation services.

#### Did you know that...

- Two-thirds of older adults who visit parks report moderate or high levels of physical activity during their visit? <sup>1</sup>
- Active users of public parks have a lower body mass index (a ratio between weight and height) than did people who use parks passively or not at all? <sup>1</sup>
- People who visited parks for longer periods of time (one hour or more) had significantly lower systolic blood pressures than those who only stayed for short periods of time (less than one hour)? <sup>2</sup>
- Park users who were more physically active and who made frequent contact with friends through their leisure time were less likely to report feeling depressed? <sup>1</sup>
- Users of a community-based senior wellness program had significantly higher endurance levels, even after controlling for their level of physical activity? <sup>3</sup>
- Stress relief, clearing one's mind, and exercise were the most common benefits that older adults attributed to their park visits? <sup>1</sup>
- People who visited parks with companions (as opposed to visiting alone) reported significantly higher levels of physical health? <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Godbey, G., Roy, M., Payne, L. L., & Orsega-Smith, E. (1998). *Final Report on the Health and Park Use Study*, The National Recreation and Park Association.

<sup>2</sup> Orsega-Smith, E., Mowen, A., Payne, L., & Godbey, G. (2004). The interaction of stress and park use on psycho-physiological health in older adults. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 36(2), 232-257.

<sup>3</sup> Orsega-Smith, E., Payne, L. L., & Godbey, G. (2003). Outcomes associated with participation in a community parks and recreation based wellness program for older adults. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 11(4), 516-531.

- Citizens who had better access to parks, visited parks more frequently, and engaged in physically-active park behaviors also made fewer visits to their doctor (for reasons other than a regular check-up)?<sup>1</sup>
- People who visited parks more frequently were more likely to have a positive perception of their general health?<sup>1</sup>
- Fifty-percent of older adults who participated in light to moderate aerobic park activity reported being in a better mood after visiting parks?<sup>4</sup>
- Research subjects who drove through a simulated park environment recovered more quickly from stressful situations than those who drove past a simulated environment dominated by built structures?<sup>5</sup>
- Older adults who engaged in a broad repertoire of park and recreation activities were more likely to report higher levels of perceived physical health?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Godbey G., & Blazey, M. (1983). Old people in urban parks: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 15, 229-244.

<sup>5</sup> Parsons, R., Tassinary, L. G., Ulrich, R. S., Hebl, M. R., & Grossman, Alexander, M. (1998). The view from the road: Implications for stress recovery and immunization. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 18, 113-140.

<sup>6</sup> Payne, L. L., Mowen, A. J., & Montoro-Rodriguez, J. (In Press). The role of leisure style in maintaining the health of older adults with arthritis. *Journal of Leisure Research*.