

IELTS Listening Lesson 4

Setting:

You will hear a university professor giving a lecture to students about the effects of urban green spaces on mental health.

Questions 1–8 Questions 1–5

Complete the notes below.

Write ONE WORD ONLY for each answer.

Urban Green Spaces and Mental Health

1. Green spaces include parks, gardens, and _____-lined streets.

2. Cities can increase psychological strain due to traffic noise and

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_____."

5. Parks promote social interaction and reduce _____.

Questions 6–10

Choose the correct letter, A, B, or C.

6. According to Dutch research, green spaces have the greatest impact on

- A. wealthy professionals.
- B. school-age children.
- C. vulnerable groups.

7. Stress Reduction Theory suggests nature exposure leads to
- A. improved academic performance.
 - B. lower cortisol levels.
 - C. better vision.
8. Which factor reduces the effectiveness of a green space?
- A. Poor maintenance
 - B. Too many people
 - C. Lack of natural shade
9. What does "perceived safety" influence?
- A. Local government policy
 - B. Whether people use the space

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Script

Good morning, everyone. Today, we're going to explore an increasingly relevant topic in urban studies and public health—how urban green spaces affect mental well-being. Now, by "green spaces," I mean areas in cities that include parks, gardens, riverbanks, tree-lined streets—anywhere with some level of natural vegetation accessible to the public.

So, let's start with the basic premise. For many years, city planning focused primarily on infrastructure—roads, buildings, utilities—but over time, researchers began to ask: what about the psychological health of the people living in these dense urban environments? Cities can be stressful places: traffic, noise, overcrowding... they all take a toll on the

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significantly lower levels of mental distress—even when controlling for income, employment, and physical health. So, the green space itself seemed to have a direct, positive effect.

Another interesting study was carried out in the Netherlands, which is one of the most densely populated countries in Europe. Researchers there discovered that people living within a one-kilometer radius of green space were less likely to report anxiety and depression. And the benefits were most pronounced for children and the elderly—groups that tend to be more vulnerable to environmental stressors.

But let's break this down. Why exactly do green spaces help? There are a few theories. First, there's the Attention Restoration Theory, proposed by Kaplan and Kaplan, which suggests that natural environments help restore our ability to focus. When you're walking through a quiet park, your brain gets a chance to recover from the constant stimulation of city life. The theory is that natural surroundings allow for a kind of soft fascination—your attention is engaged, but not overwhelmed.

Then there's the Stress Reduction Theory, introduced by Roger Ulrich. According to this model, exposure to natural environments leads to immediate physiological changes—lower blood pressure, reduced heart rate, and lower levels of cortisol, which is the stress hormone. Ulrich even

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anxiety. They also promote social interaction. Think about your local park—families picnicking, kids playing, elderly people chatting on benches. These interactions, even brief ones, can create a sense of community that combats loneliness, which is itself a major contributor to mental health issues.

Now, not all green spaces are equal. The quality, accessibility, and design of the space matter a lot. A poorly maintained park with graffiti and broken benches won't provide the same benefits as a clean, safe, well-landscaped area. Researchers talk about something called “perceived safety”—if people don't feel safe, they won't use the space, no matter

how green it is. So, city planners have to consider lighting, sightlines, and even types of vegetation to make these areas inviting.

Let's touch briefly on urban inequality. Unfortunately, access to green space is not distributed evenly. Lower-income neighborhoods often have less greenery and fewer public parks. This creates a sort of environmental injustice, where the people who might benefit most from stress relief and social interaction have the least access to it. Cities like Toronto and Melbourne are beginning to address this by mapping green space distribution and prioritizing park development in under-served areas.

Now, you might wonder whether simply looking at pictures of nature or having indoor plants offers the same benefits. To some extent, yes.

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research. We're seeing a global trend toward integrating nature into urban design. This includes rooftop gardens, vertical forests—buildings covered in greenery—green belts along roads, and even urban wetlands. Singapore is often cited as a leader in this area, with its “City in a Garden” approach. They've developed green corridors that connect parks, allowing wildlife—and people—to move freely through the city in a more natural environment.

Some cities are also introducing policies like the “15-minute city,” where all residents should have access to green space within a 15-minute walk from their home. Paris and Barcelona are leading in this respect, and early feedback suggests increased resident satisfaction.

To conclude, urban green spaces offer a range of psychological, physiological, and social benefits that are increasingly backed by empirical evidence. From lowering stress levels to promoting community and even reducing the prevalence of mental health disorders, the role of nature in cities is no longer just aesthetic—it's essential.

So the next time you feel overwhelmed, go take a walk in the park. It's not just a break—it might be exactly what your brain needs.

Alright, in our next lecture, we'll shift gears and look at how urban transportation systems affect public health—both positively and negatively. Please make sure to read the assigned article by Dr. Lopez on urban walkability before then.

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3. health

4. fascination

5. loneliness

6. C

7. B

8. A

9. B

10. A