

6 Minute English

A natural therapy

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello, this is 6 Minute English. I'm Neil.

Georgina

And I'm Georgina.

Neil

Georgina, what do you do to cheer yourself up?

Georgina

Having a walk usually helps – especially if it's in the countryside.

Neil

Yes, being in all the green open space can certainly help us relax and de-stress – getting back to nature can be a **tonic** when you're feeling down.

Georgina

A **tonic** is something that makes you feel happier and healthier. I'll drink to that!

Neil

Me too. But connecting with the natural world is particularly beneficial to people with mental health issues such as clinical depression. And it's something that's being called 'ecotherapy'. More on that in a moment but here's a question for you to answer, Georgina.

Georgina

OK, Neil. Fire away.

Neil

Well, seeing or even hugging trees is a form of therapy, but how high is the world's tallest tree thought to be? Is it...

- a) 65.8 metres,
- b) 115.8 metres, or
- c) 185.8 metres

Georgina, any ideas?

Georgina

Not a clue – but let's go for the highest figure of 185.8 metres.

Neil

Are you sure? Well, we'll have to wait until the end of the programme to find out. Now, the mental health charity, Mind, describes ecotherapy as a formal type of treatment which involves doing outdoor activities in nature. However, there's not one simple definition, it just relates to doing activities outdoors.

Georgina

Yes, it can involve doing many things, such as outdoor yoga or **horticulture** – another name for gardening. It doesn't involve taking medication, but instead it just develops a person's relationship with nature.

Neil

It's something Patricia Hasbach knows a lot about. She's a clinical psychotherapist and told the BBC Radio programme Health Check how ecotherapy can help. Does she say it can help everyone?

Patricia Hasbach, clinical psychotherapist

I often think about ecotherapy as another tool in the therapist's toolbox. It's not a **panacea**. It's not going to erase somebody's pain or grief. But it is a powerful tool, you know. Traditional therapy has stopped at the urban boundary.

Neil

So it's interesting that she describes ecotherapy as a tool – something that can be used to achieve something else. Here it can be used to help improve someone's mental health.

Georgina

Ah, but she says it's not a **panacea** – so not something that will solve everything – it won't erase or get rid of someone's pain. But going beyond what she calls the 'urban boundary', and into the natural world, means there is another method for helping people.

Neil

Now, as we've mentioned, ecotherapy can take on many forms – doing art in a forest or running on a beach are all **therapeutic**. They're things that make you feel better or healthier.

Georgina

Well, I think that's clear, but what is it about the outdoors that affects us?

Neil

A good question, Georgina. It seems from research that our busy brains are always on guard, but when we get into nature it gets a break, there's not so much to be on the lookout for and we can relax.

Georgina

Well, it does seem the negative symptoms of urban life can benefit from a dose of nature – a dose is an amount of something. Let's get a good explanation from an expert.

Environmental psychologist Birgitta Gatersleben also spoke to the BBC Health Check programme and gave two reasons – one of them, she explained, was something called 'biophilia'.

Birgitta Gatersleben, environmental psychologist

Biophilia, very briefly, is really an innate positive response that people have with life and life-like features. The idea that nature reminds us of life, and if we (are) exposed to the natural elements then our sort of negative feelings get almost immediately replaced with positive emotions.

Neil

Birgitta Gatersleben there explaining **biophilia** – which is a passion for or empathy with the natural world and living things.

Georgina

She said biophilia is **innate**, which means is a quality that you're born with. So basically, most of us were born to connect with nature – nature reminds us of life and gives us good, positive emotions.

Neil

Naturally. OK. Well, Georgina, maybe getting today's quiz question right will give you positive emotions. Earlier I asked you how high the world's tallest tree is thought to be. Is it...

- a) 65.8 metres,
- b) 115.8 metres, or
- c) 185.8 metres

What did you say?

Georgina

I said c) 185.8 metres.

Neil

Oh dear, I'm afraid that's far too high! The correct answer is 115.8 metres. Never mind. The tree, named Hyperion, is a type of redwood and was found in California in 2006.

Georgina

Well, that's still very tall, and would be great to see.

Neil

Now we've just got time to recap some of the vocabulary we've discussed, starting with **tonic** which can be a fizzy drink you mix with an alcoholic drink, but in the context of therapy it can mean something that makes you feel happier and healthier.

Georgina

Horticulture is the study or activity of growing garden plants – in other words, gardening.

Neil

A **panacea** is something believed to solve everything.

Georgina

If something is **therapeutic**, it makes you feel better or healthier.

Neil

We also discussed **biophilia**, which is a passion for or empathy with the natural world and living things.

Georgina

And **innate** means a quality that you naturally have – you're born with it.

Neil

Well, as you know I have an innate quality for presenting this programme – but now it's time to go. Please join us next time, and don't forget to check us out on your favourite social media platform, on our app and of course the website [bbclearningenglish.com](https://www.bbclearningenglish.com).
Goodbye.

Georgina

Bye!

VOCABULARY

tonic

something that makes you feel happier and healthier

horticulture

the study or activity of growing garden plants

panacea

something that is believed to solve everything

therapeutic

makes you feel better or healthier

biophilia

a passion for or empathy with the natural world and living things

innate

a quality that you're born with