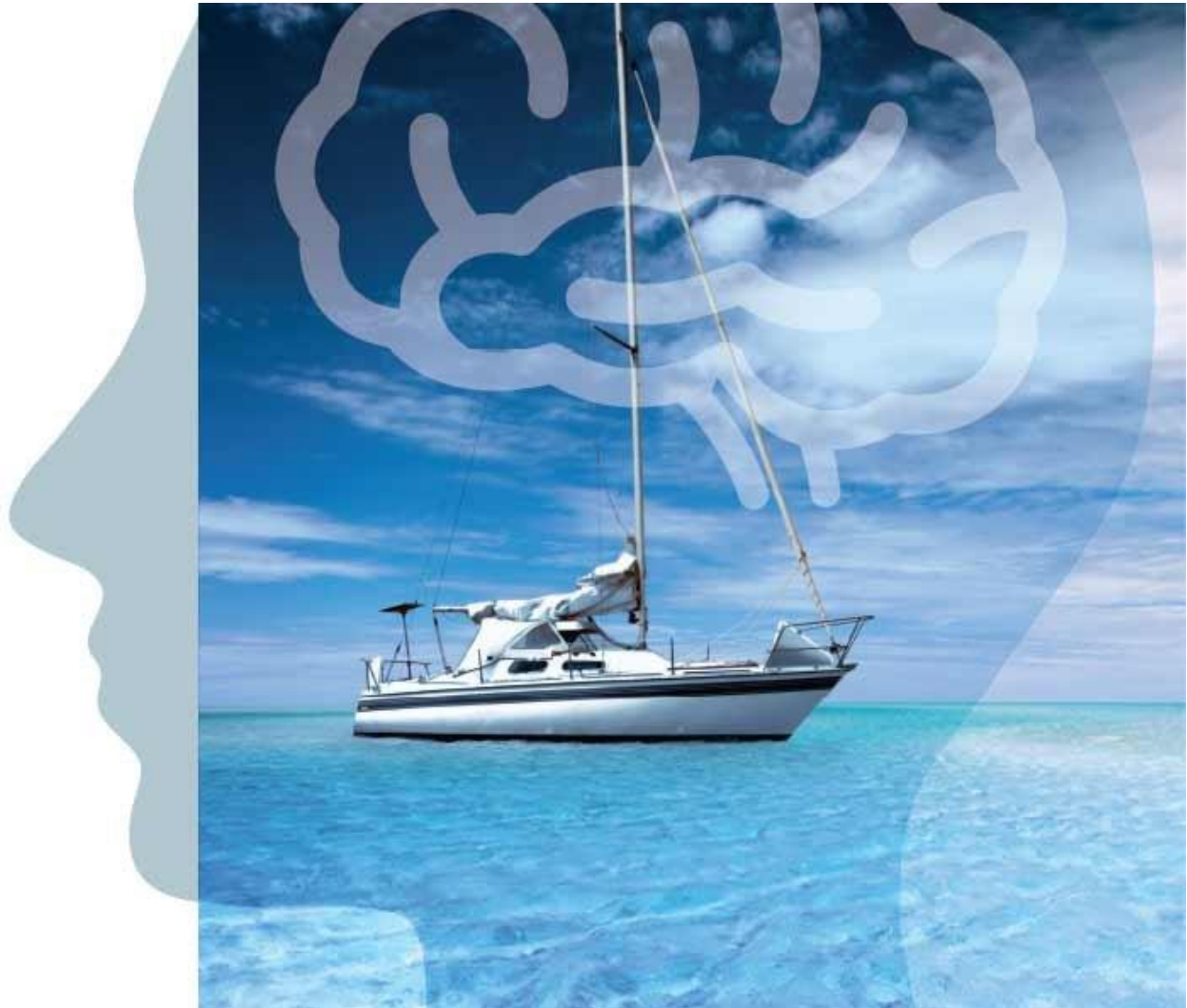


It's the View!

A view of the Water is Healthy for you!

By Charles Fort

We interview a renowned marine biologist who has proof of what most of us only suspected: **Boating makes you healthier.**



Composite Photo: Sailboat: Shutterstock/KWest; Head: Shutterstock/Shan Pierre; Brain: Shutterstock/Vector Happy

You've likely heard of green space — areas in cities or residences that are full of plants that bring us a little closer to nature. **Author and marine biologist Dr. Wallace Nichols uses a new phrase — blue space — that those of us familiar with water will all understand.**

Lakes, rivers, oceans, bays, even creeks and swimming pools are all blue space. Dr. Nichols, author of *Blue Mind*, a *New York Times* national best-seller, has been researching how blue spaces affect us. He calls it "the blue mind."

The blue mind, he says, separates us from the pressures and distractions of life, which he refers to as "red mind." Having a blue mind lessens the stresses of the day and gives us a break from our overstimulated lives. Nichols says that the relationship of a boat to our emotional health has been largely overlooked, until recently.

BoatUS: We know boating is fun and we take away a lot of good things after a day on the water. What does science say?

Nichols: We know from studies that water positively affects us auditorily, visually, and somatically. Neuroscientists can now pinpoint in your brain where your emotions manifest — it's called the amygdala. **They've found that even just looking at water can trigger feelings of wellness, compassion, empathy, and happiness. We experience slower breathing, reduced heart rate, and lowered skin temperature.**

Blue mind takes us from our prefrontal cortex, responsible for things like planning and decision-making, to our default mode network, when we're thinking about others or ourselves and not specific tasks. Studies from University of Exeter Medical School in the United Kingdom show that being on or near the water, or even just hearing it, adds wellness and emotional benefits. People say they feel better and their measurable vital signs agree — breathing, blood pressure, heart rate, and so

BoatUS: What happens within our body and mind when we're on a boat?

Nichols: Our heart rates and breathing slow, and people say they feel better and their stress decreases. The sound of water increases blood flow to the brain, inducing relaxation, something we've probably all felt. Even the mere sight of water can induce a flood of neurochemicals that promote wellness. On or around water, our stress hormones dip. We really do feel better when we're on the water.

BoatUS: A 2017 study conducted by Wakefield Research found 4 in 5 Americans say being around water relaxes them, and 72 percent say they feel healthier after spending time on the water. Why do we feel good when we're on the water?

Nichols: When stress overload and attention fatigue are sustained over long periods of time, the "always-on" lifestyle can eventually result in memory problems, poor judgment, anxiety attacks, nervous habits, and even depression. Chronic stress damages the cardiovascular, immune, digestive, nervous, and musculoskeletal systems. It lowers levels of dopamine and serotonin, causing us to feel exhausted and depressed.

According to the "2018 State of American Vacation Study," we're working longer hours, dealing with more stress, and are constantly connected to technology, with only 46 percent of us taking full vacation time. Time on the water lets us unplug; there is less noise, fewer voices, less stimulation. The minutia of life is decreased. We get back our brain bandwidth that we can use for other things. Water takes away distractions; that's what blue mind is. And boats are one of the best ways to experience water. A boat is in fact medicine in our lives.

More Research In The Works

Dr. Nichols says that there is a research project in the works that will more precisely measure the physical and psychological benefits of a blue mind. "Imagine a device like a Fitbit that not only can tell you your heart rate, but also your emotional state and level of focus. Small, wearable EEGs (electroencephalograms) are in the future, and we plan to use these on a boat to more fully understand the positive effects of being on the water." patreon.com/wallacenichols

BoatUS: The same study noted that nearly two-thirds of boat owners said owning a boat has brought their family closer. How does being on the water help our relationships?

Nichols: The benefits of being on the water are magnified if you enjoy the sea with someone close to you. Your relationships deepen whenever you connect more, which happens naturally on a boat. As boaters, we're in a smaller space and forced to look at each other and interact. We become better listeners and converse easier, as distractions are stripped away, which helps form building blocks in relationships.

BoatUS: But how? Is better relationship-building on the water science-based?

Nichols: There is a saying in neuroscience: Neurons that fire together wire together. Every experience we have with another person — the thoughts, feelings, and sensations — create a neural network, which helps you store and recall information. For example, when you focus on someone and have fun with them, your neural network helps you retain those positive memories through many subtle triggers, which makes you closer.

A grandfather who takes his grandchild fishing builds lasting one-on-one memories. Spouses bond over being on the water. We get closer to our friends, and because of how it makes us feel, water is certainly a great place for a date. We recall those experiences later — both consciously and unconsciously — and that helps with our connections. With larger boats that require more than one person, you build teamwork, trust, and shared adventure, all memory-makers.

BoatUS: You've talked about the importance of having awe in our lives. What do you mean by that?

Nichols: Aside from the physiological, emotional, and psychological benefits, Dr. Paul Piff, assistant professor of psychology at University of California, Berkeley, says that water is the number-one source of awe, that feeling of being connected to something larger than ourselves — no matter whether that awe is created by dramatic or by calm experiences and visions.

Studies by Dacher Keltner, professor of psychology at University of California, Berkeley, and co-director of the Greater Good Science Center, have shown that awe leads to empathy and compassion. Awe, he found, diminishes the individual self and its concerns, and increases positive social behavior.

Subsequent studies show that awe leads people to cooperate, share resources, and sacrifice for others. Awe is an important emotion that helps us get outside ourselves and is associated with increased ethical decision-making and greater generosity. Keltner says that awe is elicited especially by nature. Water is one of the best and easiest sources of awe and wonder, and a boat is the greatest technology ever invented to explore the vast world of blue-mind health benefits.

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