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Information about the abstract

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Title: **Ocean health in Belgium: Living near the coast is associated with better health**

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Abstract: (max. 250-350 words)

Natural environments have long been associated with health risks, but potential benefits for health and wellbeing are only recently being explored. Similar to green spaces, coastal areas provide a good environmental quality with opportunities for healthy social and physical activities (e.g. in the context of blue tourism), allowing to improve mental (e.g. less stress) and physical health. However, evidence linking residential proximity to the coast with human health and wellbeing is scarce. The present study investigated whether Belgian citizens living closer to the coast report better subjective health and vitality. Therefore, linear regression models were applied on data from the Belgian Health Interview Survey taken in 1997, 2001, 2004, 2008 and 2013 (n = 60,939; 52% female). Our results were standardized for demographic (e.g. age, having a chronic disease, income, smoking status, physical activity, social interactions, etc.) and environmental parameters (urbanization level, % blue space and green space in the area and air quality as PM₁₀ and NO₂ concentrations). Citizens which live at the coast (< 5 km) reported 4.6 % better subjective health than citizens which live at more than 250 km from the coast. Although people living at 20-50 km reported highest scores for vitality (SF-36 score), people living in close proximity to the sea (< 5 km) also reported 5.7 % better vitality than people from the hinterland

(> 250 km). This is the first evidence of a positive association between proximity to the coast and human health and wellbeing in Belgium. Our results endorse similar findings from the UK.

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