

Art is good for us: Communicating new scientific evidence

National
Art Pass

Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery © Will Hartley / Art Fund 2025

Art Fund's toolkit for museums

Art Fund_

About the study

- Our first-of-its-kind study provides the most compelling scientific evidence to date that viewing art has immediate, measurable benefits for our health and wellbeing.
- Undertaken by King's College London and co-funded by Art Fund and the Psychiatry Research Trust, the study measured the physiological responses of participants while viewing artwork in a museum setting.
- The research found that art activates the immune, endocrine (hormone), and autonomic nervous systems all at once – something never previously recorded.
- We hope that the findings will encourage more people to visit their local museums and galleries to experience these proven health benefits firsthand, with free and discounted entry through the National Art Pass.

[Read more here](#)



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Participant having smartwatch adjusted in front of Van Gogh's Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear (1889) as part of research commissioned by Art Fund's National Art Pass and undertaken by King's College London into art's impact on the body

How to use this toolkit

We've created this simple toolkit with everything you need to make the most of this new research for your museum or gallery. We hope that by sharing the news that seeing art in a museum or gallery setting has a positive impact on the body, you'll be able to encourage new audiences to visit your venue, and advocate to decisionmakers.

We've included template copy, digital assets and a literature review.

To access and use the assets:

1. Click the access link in this document
2. Download the files
3. Amend or personalise the template copy
4. Share!

The research

In detail

The research study involved 50 volunteers, aged 18-40, who were assigned into two groups. One group viewed original artworks in a gallery setting, and one group viewed reproductions of the same paintings in a matched, non-gallery environment.

Cortisol levels - the key stress hormone - fell by an average of 22% amongst participants who viewed art in the gallery, compared to 8% for those that viewed reproductions. The gallery group also showed more dynamic heart activity - indicating that art engages the body in ways linked to both emotional arousal and stress regulation.

Meanwhile, pro-inflammatory cytokines (IL-6 and TNF- α) - which are linked to stress and a number of chronic diseases - were found to fall by 30% and 28% respectively when

viewing art in the gallery. The positive benefits in cytokine levels were not noted in those viewing reproductions whatsoever. This suggests that art has a potential calming effect on the body's inflammatory responses.

As well as appearing less stressed, participants exhibited physiological signs of excitement whilst viewing the artworks. The participants experienced dips in skin temperature (-0.74 °C) and experienced more variation in their heartbeat patterns as well as higher overall heart rates - signalling bursts of emotional arousal.

These findings suggest that art has the ability to arouse, deeply relax and reduce stress levels at the same time when viewed in a gallery - which experts say can be thought of as a "cultural workout for the body".

Key messages from the research

Art is good for you

Visiting museums can reduce stress, spark curiosity and enrich your life. This new research is scientific proof that art really is good for you.

There's no substitute for the real thing

Nothing compares to experiencing art in person, in a museum or gallery, where the immediate health benefits are most powerful. The National Art Pass helps you discover these spaces and experience just how good art can make you feel.

Art's benefits are universal

The research shows that everyone, whatever their background or experience, can enjoy the health benefits that art brings.



Participant views Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* (1889) while key biometrics are studied as part of research commissioned by Art Fund's National Art Pass and undertaken by King's College London into art's impact on the body

Expanding on why this study helps to demonstrate art is good for us, Dr Woods, researcher at Kings College London, said:

“Stress hormones and inflammatory markers like cortisol, IL-6 and TNF-alpha are linked to a wide range of health problems, from heart disease and diabetes to anxiety and depression. The fact that viewing original art lowered these markers suggests that cultural experiences may play a real role in protecting both mind and body.”

Social copy and assets

Template social copy

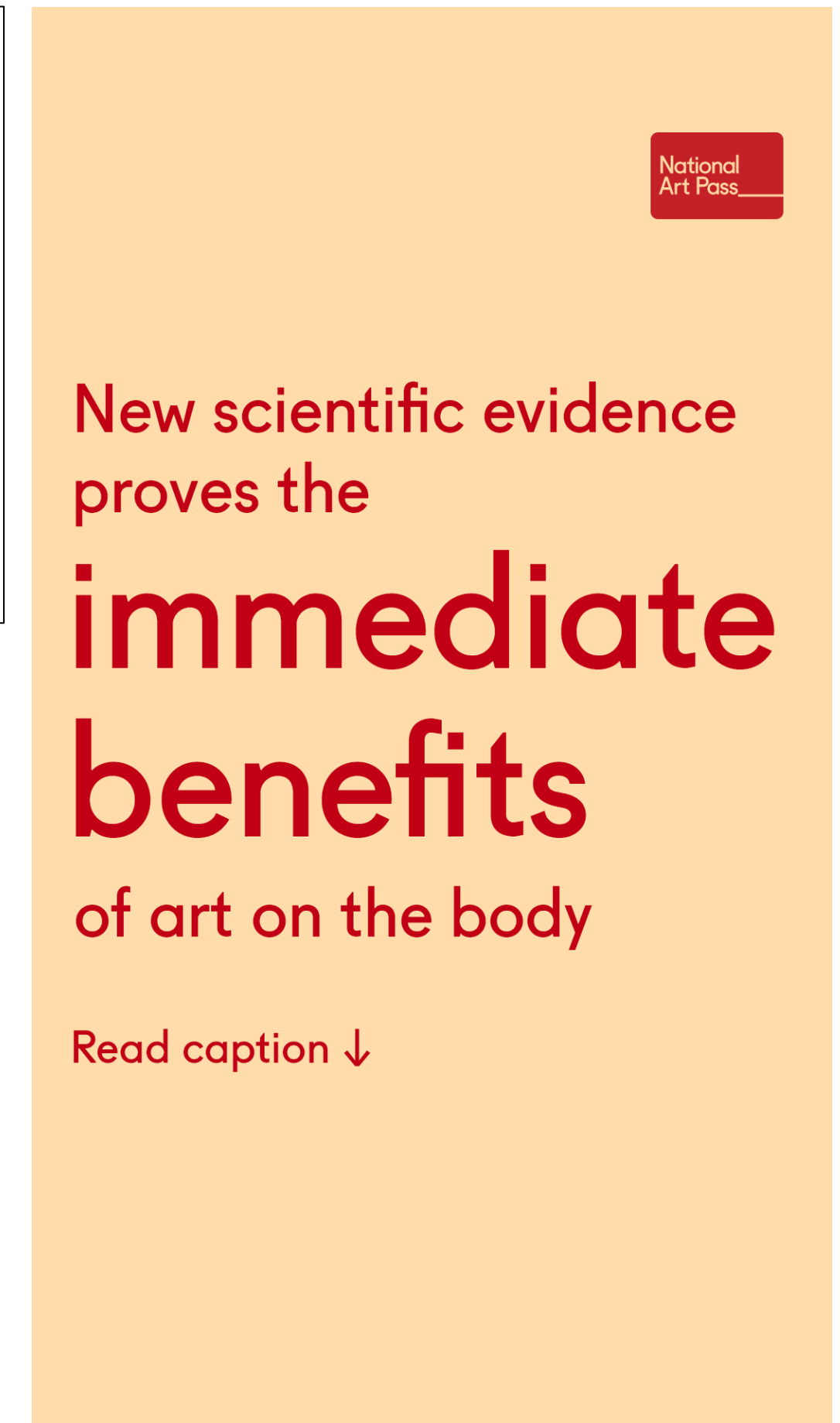
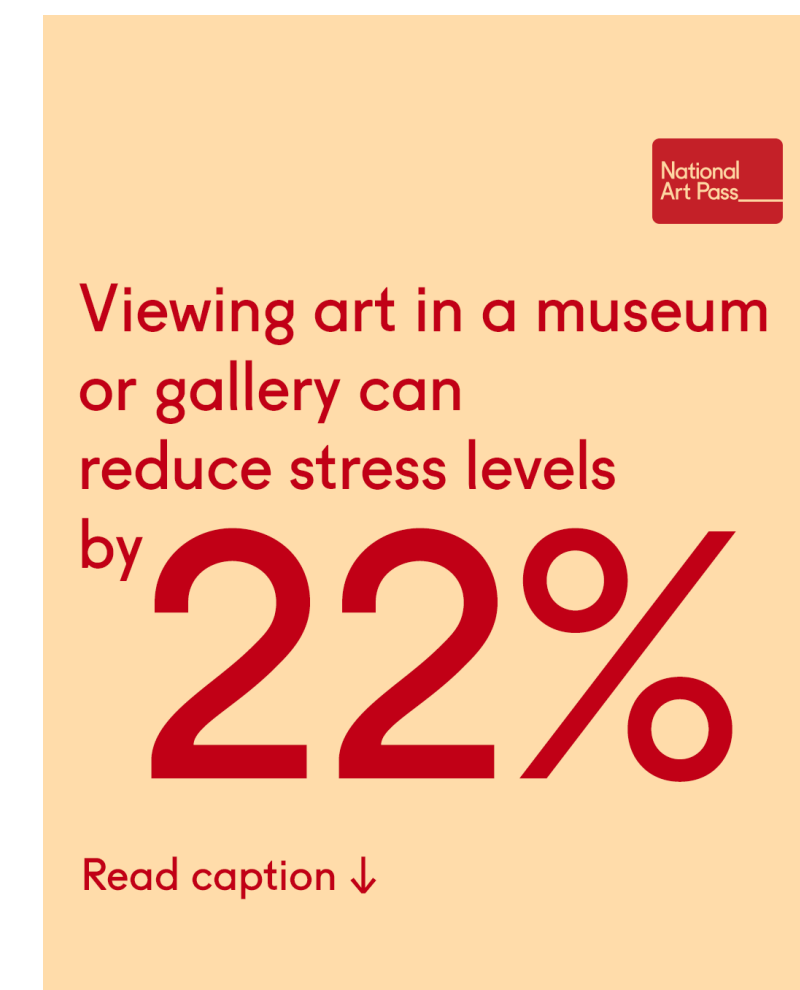
Visiting museums and galleries to look at art is good for you!

New research from King's College London, co-funded by [@ArtFund](#) and the Psychiatry Research Trust, has revealed that viewing art in a museum setting can immediately boost your health and wellbeing.

The study found that engaging with artworks activates your immune, endocrine (hormone) and autonomic nervous systems – lowering cortisol levels by 22%!

Visit [Museum Name](#) to experience it for yourself – feel the benefits firsthand, with [insert National Art Pass offer such as 'free entry'](#) through the National Art Pass.

Find out more about the new research:
<https://bit.ly/3JwYh1C>

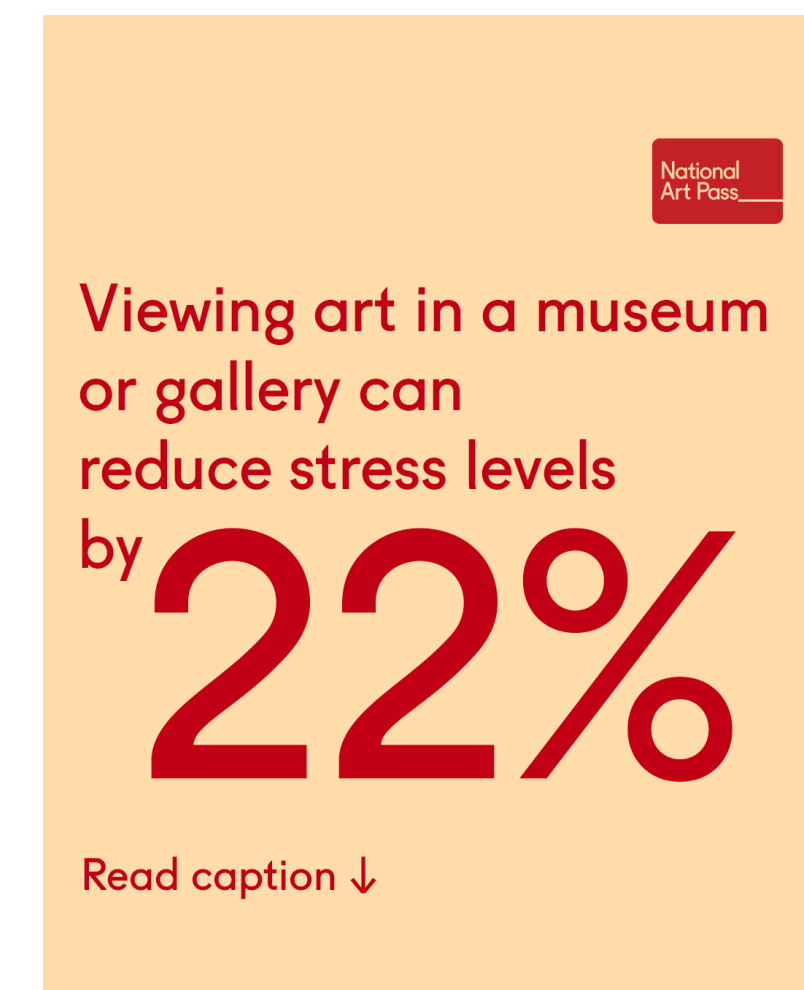


Social copy and assets

Digital assets

These assets have been created for easy layering onto your own images; you can add them to your photos to customise your materials.

[Download digital assets here](#)



The wellbeing impact of museums and galleries

Evidence summary

To help you advocate for the wellbeing benefits of museum visiting, we've brought together [a review of recent research](#) showing that museums and galleries support health and wellbeing.

- Engaging with museums and galleries through both visiting and participation has clear, evidence-based benefits for mental and physical wellbeing. Research shows improvements in mental health, life satisfaction, and social connection, alongside reduced risks of depression, dementia, and loneliness.
- Emerging physiological studies also suggest that even brief museum visits can lower stress hormones, blood pressure, and heart rate, while regular long-term cultural engagement supports better mental health, cognitive function, and longevity.
- This summary is grouped into two areas of engagement: visiting museums and taking part in museum programmes. It highlights key findings from UK-based studies published between 2014 and 2024.

The wellbeing impact of museums and galleries

Evidence summary

- **Mental health & life satisfaction:** Frequent cultural attendance (visiting museums, galleries, exhibitions, theatre, cinema and concerts every few months or more) is associated with better mental health, higher wellbeing, and lower psychological distress (Wheatley & Bickerton, 2017; Wang et al., 2020).
- **Quality of life:** Visiting museums and galleries has a positive impact on happiness and self-reported health among adults (Fujiwara, 2013; Fujiwara & MacKerron, 2015).
- **Reduced depression:** Adults aged 50+ who visit museums every few months have up to a 32% lower risk of developing depression, further lowered to 48% when engaging monthly or more 48% (Fancourt & Tymoszuk, 2019).
- **Reduced dementia risk:** Regular attendance lowers the risk of developing dementia over a 10-year period (Fancourt, Steptoe & Cadar, 2018).
- **Lower frailty and disability:** Older adults who regularly participate in cultural activities have a lower likelihood of becoming frail or developing a disability (Rogers & Fancourt, 2020; Fancourt & Steptoe, 2019a).
- **Reduced loneliness:** Regular museum visits significantly reduce feelings of loneliness (Tymoszuk, Perkins, Fancourt et al., 2020).
- **Longer life expectancy:** Frequent cultural engagement is associated with longer survival (Bygren et al., 2009; Fancourt & Steptoe, 2019).
- **Reduced anxiety:** Museum art programmes have been shown to reduce anxiety and build confidence (Binnie, 2010) and viewing art in a gallery setting has been shown to lower levels of the key stress hormone, cortisol.
- **Reduced loneliness:** Studies of museum-based programmes including *The Museums on Prescription* found that regular visits, guided tours, and art-making, can improve wellbeing and reduce social isolation for older adults (Thomson et al., 2016).
- **Cognitive function:** Older Adults who frequently visited museums, art galleries and exhibitions were less likely to have poorer cognitive functioning. Higher frequency of visits was associated with greater protective effects on cognition (Fancourt & Steptoe, 2018)

How to credit the research

If you reference or quote the research, please use the following credit line:

The Physiological Impact of Viewing Original Artworks vs. Reprints: A Comparative Study (2025) was undertaken by King's College London and co-funded by Art Fund and the Psychiatry Research Trust.



Woman observing Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere* (1882), in a study commissioned by Art Fund's National Art Pass and undertaken by King's College London, to investigate the benefits of art on the body

Thank you for using this toolkit!

If you have any questions about the research or how to use this toolkit, please contact museums@artfund.org or aquant-epps@artfund.org