

better. In one related study, patients recovering from surgery in rooms with a view of nature fared better than those with only a brick wall to look at.

I'm convinced this is one of the reasons many of us discovered outdoor pursuits during lockdown – it's as if we knew that nature could relieve the attention fatigue caused by too much time on Zoom and endless negative news reports. Perhaps the walks, wild swims and paddleboarding were our efforts at recovery. We didn't call it soft fascination, but that's what we were seeking all along.

When I've been burning the candle at both ends and suffering from attention fatigue, the impact of nature is immeasurable. If you've ever felt soothed by the sight of a raindrop sliding slowly down a window pane, you'll know what I mean. Watching seaweed sway lazily beneath the surface of the water at the beach also does it for me; my shoulders drop and my breathing slows. Problems that seem insurmountable at my desk are put into perspective by the sea. It's not that nature is magic, it's simply that the natural environment stimulates your attention without demanding that your brain work too hard.

But you don't have to lose yourself in nature to reap the benefits. I once had a moment of soft fascination in a coffee shop that wasn't unlike the experience others might have in a forest or cathedral. I'd put in ridiculously long hours amid intense pressure at work. As a migraine swept over me – a sure sign that I'm suffering from attention fatigue – I fled for respite. Sinking into a chair, I caught sight of myself reflected upside down in a stainless steel bin and was transfixed. Yes, really. It took staring at a dustbin to recognise the damage I was doing by giving my attention only to things that were grinding me down. Nowadays, I know to take a break well before a bin becomes my muse.

You know that feeling when you're on holiday and you gradually start to feel energised rather than exhausted when you think about work? That's a sign that soft fascination is working its magic. Letting your mind wander, especially in nature, creates opportunities for ideas and reflection that don't come when you're at your desk.

Peeters explains: 'When we use soft fascination, we give ourselves permission to pause, and by allowing space, we unconsciously invite new ideas, solutions, opportunities and alignment with something bigger.'

***“Letting your mind wander creates opportunities for ideas that don't come when you're at your desk”***

