

# Whitney

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What are the qualities of water that make the brain sparkle? The brain responds to color, shininess and motion.

Blue. According to neurosurgeon Amir Vokshoor, a spinal and cranial disorder specialist, "blue's wavelengths correlate to the release of neurotransmitters thought to be associated with feelings of euphoria, joy, reward, and wellness related to the effects of dopamine."

The motion of water is therapeutic – because of what we are made of and because of how our brain works. Nichols: "It's why humans love fountains and waterfalls... (are) transfixed by sunlight sparkling on the surface of ponds, lakes, streams, rivers and oceans. In the motion of water, we see patterns that never exactly repeat themselves yet have a restful similarity."

Water slows us down, counterbalancing the hypervigilant state of the brain in a technology-driven culture. Floating in water is actually meditative. After spending 90 minutes in a floatation tank, Nichols felt as if he had been staring at the ocean for hours – floating allows the brain to move from the waking state (beta waves) to that state of relaxation prior to sleep (theta).

Nichols: "In this altered state the mind settles into nothingness, the inner voice is silent, and often a feeling of oneness and bliss occurs." This is what neuroscientists are now referring to as "Drift" mode – daydreaming – once thought to be wasting time, is now looked at neurologically as valuable time for the brain to rest, recover and "float" in involuntary attention.

Swimming, fishing, surfing, scuba-diving, sailing, jetskiing, canoeing, kayaking, wind surfing, paddleboarding – globally, 500



The Roseway will dock in New Castle at the University of New Hampshire pier and will offer day ocean sails through July 29 as part of the Sail Portsmouth Festival.

million people chose water-based recreation.

Water activities heal. Sail to Prevail in Newport and Nantucket uses a fleet of specially-equipped sailboats to help 1,500 people with disabilities learn the basics of sailing. Heroes on the Water (HOW) helped more than 3,000 wounded warriors and vets to relax, rehabilitate and reintegrate by taking them kayak fishing. Other organizations use surfing and fishing to treat, stress, addiction, autism.

Nichols says water "distracts us in the best sort of way, allowing us to think of little else beyond what's in front of you... you don't need to meditate to take advantage of its effects because it meditates you."

In 2010, Nichols created the Blue Mind Conference, an interdisciplinary gathering of professionals working at the intersection of brain science and

conservation. Brain scientists, oceanographers, explorers, educators, psychologists, and artists come together "to create the new story of water, consider the deep human connection to our water planet, and explore the cognitive, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual benefits of keeping it healthy."

Thus far, seven Blue Mind conferences have been held around the globe.

*Blue Mind 8: Water is Medicine* will be Oct. 3-8, at the Frost Museum of Science, Miami, Florida. Practitioners, researchers, wild water men and women, artists and writers will bring "world-changing" research and practical applications to support the fact that water – in all its shapes, sizes, and uses, truly is medicine. The website states: "Be prepared to change the way you think, feel, and act towards water... for good."

Nichols has developed a small symbol to personalize his global issue – a blue marble to be passed from person to person as a reminder about how water saves us and how we must save the water. So think about passing along a blue marble to someone else – as you kayak the Nashua River. Or spread your wings, because – of course – New Hampshire has it all – rivers, lakes, ocean. Gundalow and Portsmouth Harbor cruises; the Isles of Shoals cruises; the Mount Washington on Lake Winnepesaukee. Or go see the Tall Ships this weekend, July 25-29, in Portsmouth's Parade of Sail, led this year by the schooner Roseway, known for her red sails.

Blue marble, blue mind – a talisman of neuro-conservation.

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