

'Eatin' (not so) good in the neighborhood'

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Living without a car in close proximity to fast food restaurants is associated with excess body mass index and weight gain, according to a University of Pittsburgh study available online and published in the September issue of the *Journal of Urban Health*. Indeed, adults in areas with high fast food concentration who didn't have a car were as much as 12 pounds heavier than those who lived in neighborhoods that lacked such restaurants.

"Owning a car is generally associated with a more [sedentary lifestyle](#) and excess weight gain because people spend more time in their cars and less time walking," said Sanae Inagami, M.D., study lead author and assistant professor, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. Yet, when Inagami and her colleagues looked at whether a high concentration of [fast food](#) restaurants impacted this association, they found that not owning a car in areas where fast food was more readily available increased the risk of [obesity](#).

"Fast food may be specific to weight gain in particular populations and locations," she said. "People who are less affluent don't own cars and can't go distances for healthier foods. As a result, they may end up opting for the lower-priced and high caloric foods available at fast food chains."

The study, part of the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Study, was based on a survey of 2,156 adults in 63 neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. Car owners on average weighed 8.5 pounds more than non-car owners except in areas with high fast food concentration, meaning five

fast food restaurants per mile. Non-car owners in high fast food concentration areas were found to weigh 2.7 pounds more than car owners who lived in the same areas, and 12 pounds more than residents of areas without fast food outlets. Those who did not own a [car](#) and lived in areas without fast food outlets weighed the least.

"There has been a major focus on fast food and its impact on individual health, but we need to consider the availability of all types of restaurants at individual and community levels," said Inagami. "Since our study showed that total restaurant density was associated with weight gain in all individuals, not just those who did not own cars, we also need to encourage people to pay more attention to their food environment," she said.

More information: Link to study: [www.springerlink.com/content/f ... 9765065/fulltext.pdf](http://www.springerlink.com/content/f...9765065/fulltext.pdf)

Source: University of Pittsburgh

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