

Tidy house, fitter body?

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An Indiana University study that examined the relationship between physical activity and a range of variables involving urban residents' homes and neighborhoods found that the inside of study subjects' homes had more to do with higher physical activity levels than the sidewalks, lighting and other elements considered.

"At the end of the day, the interior condition of their house seemed to be the only thing affecting their physical activity," said NiCole Keith, associate professor in the Department of [Physical Education](#) at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. "It was not at all what we expected."

The study involved 998 [African Americans](#) ages 49-65 who lived in St. Louis and participated in the African American Health [longitudinal study](#), which began in 2000. African Americans, notes Keith, are disproportionately affected by risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Physical activity can reduce the likelihood that people will develop risk factors for cardiovascular disease and also reduce the effect of the risk factors when they exist. African Americans, however, have relatively low rates of physical activity.

Keith said efforts to increase physical activity rates in city-dwellers might need to be taken inside. Much attention has been given to improving sidewalks and other aspects of the built environment outside, which Keith said is worthwhile, but if people already are not active in their homes, researchers should look at ways to increase this.

"If you spend your day dusting, cleaning, doing laundry, you're active," she said. "This will inform interventions. They won't take 30 minutes to go for a walk, but they'll take 30 minutes to clean."

More about the study:

- The study used a combination of self-assessments and objective assessments to gauge study participants' perceptions of their neighborhood and residences. Researchers based in St. Louis rated the interior and exterior of the dwellings and immediate vicinity, including such things as cleanliness, furnishings, noise, air quality and conditions of the dwelling and those of nearby buildings.
- The seasonally adjusted Yale Physical Activity Scale was used to assess physical activity. The YPAS was adjusted to take into consideration the self-assessments and object assessments along with demographic, socioeconomic, health conditions and physical measures involving subjects.

Keith said the findings were unexpected and raise more questions. They suggest that something about the condition of someone's residence drives [physical activity](#), she said, or that people are being physically active while they keep their homes tidy.

"Are the types of people who take care of their bodies the same types of people who take care of their homes?" she asked.

Provided by Indiana University

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