

Peer pressure can keep you healthy

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Hanging out with healthy friends could be the best way to keep fit. A study of 3610 Australian women, published in BioMed Central's open access *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* found that physical activity and healthy eating behavior were both strongly affected by social norms.

Kylie Ball, from Deakin University, Australia, worked with a team of researchers to survey the 18-46 year old women. She said, "The importance of social environmental influences on health-promoting behaviors such as physical activity and [healthy eating](#) has been increasingly recognized. Ours is one of the first studies to demonstrate the association of both social support and social norms with physical activity and eating behaviors".

The researchers tested the extent to which a fashion for healthy behavior among a person's contacts could influence their own lifestyle. The women who took part in the study were asked to rate how much they agreed with statements like "I often see other people walking in my neighborhood" and "Lots of women I know eat fast food often". Those women who moved in healthier circles were in turn more likely to eat well and get more [exercise](#).

According to Ball, "These findings suggest that healthy behavior may be contagious. The potential to modify social norms as an intervention lever for promoting increased engagement in [physical activity](#) and healthy eating is worthy of further investigation".

More information: Is healthy behavior contagious: associations of social norms with physical activity and healthy eating, Kylie Ball, Robert W Jeffery, Gavin Abbott, Sarah A McNaughton and David Crawford, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* (in press), www.ijbnpa.org/

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