

Want to go for a walk? Your neighborhood might play a part

February 28 2011, By Glenda Fauntleroy

Making a 30-minute walk part of your daily routine could come down to the positive features that exist in your neighborhood, says a new Australian study.

Although current recommendations advise adults to get at least 30 minutes of [aerobic exercise](#) five days of the week to stay healthy, the researchers were not surprised to find that only about 37 percent of [participants](#) met that goal.

“Unfortunately many Australians don’t achieve the recommended activity levels, and I am quite sure this is a global problem,” said lead researcher Lee-Ann Wilson of the School of Public Health at Queensland University of Technology.

In the study appearing in the March/April issue of *American Journal of Health Promotion*, researchers evaluated data from 10,286 middle-age residents in 200 Brisbane, Australia, [neighborhoods](#), who responded to a mailed questionnaire about their neighborhood participation in physical activity.

The researchers looked at many different neighborhood characteristics to see which made participants more liable to meet or exceed recommendations, such as street connectivity, hilliness, tree coverage, bikeways, streetlights and distance to a river or coast.

More trees in the neighborhood made it less likely people would walk

300 or more minutes per week, and having good street lighting made it 25 percent more likely that people would walk that much. Individuals with bikeways in their neighborhood were 34 percent more apt to walk between 30 and 90 minutes per week than those without bikeways. People who lived by a river or coast were 47 percent more prone to walk between 30 and 90 minutes per week.

“A surprising finding was the strength of association between [walking](#) and proximity to the Brisbane River or the coast,” said Wilson. “A lot of work has gone on in Brisbane to provide pleasant walkways along the river and it would seem that many people are taking advantage of this.”

Thomas Glass, Ph.D., an associate professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, an epidemiologist who studies the role of social and behavioral factors in population health, found the study convincing.

“Everyone agrees that environmental interventions will be needed to stem the tide of the obesity epidemic,” said Glass. “This is one of the strongest pieces of evidence we have to date that factors like density and street connectivity are associated with walking.”

More information: Wilson LM, et al. The association between objectively measured neighborhood features and walking in middle-aged adults. Am J Health Promo 25(4), 2011.

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