

# Poor park planning drives kids indoors

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What does it take to keep children active when they get home from school? It seems that what your neighborhood offers in terms of parks and playgrounds has a lot to do with it. In a study looking at the links between the quality of outdoor public spaces, parents' perception of them, and children's sedentary behavior, Dr. Jenny Veitch and colleagues, from the Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research at Deakin University in Australia, show that neighborhood features do influence whether or not children watch less television and play fewer computer games after school. Dr. Veitch's work is published online in Springer's journal, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*.

The increasing prevalence of childhood obesity is a major public health concern and time spent in sedentary behaviors is an important contributor. In 2004, the parents of 171 nine-year-old [children](#) completed a survey about their perceptions of the physical and social neighborhood environment. In both 2004 and 2006, the researchers asked parents about the time their child spent [watching television](#), using the computer and playing electronic games. In parallel, the authors carried out an audit of local public open spaces and objectively measured how sedentary the children were outside school hours.

Veitch and colleagues found that time spent in sedentary behaviors increased significantly between 2004 and 2006, mirrored by a rise in time spent on the computer and playing electronic games (but not watching television).

The more satisfied parents were with the quality of their neighborhood

parks and playgrounds, the less time the children spent using computers and electronic games. In addition, the more satisfied parents were in 2004, the less television their children watched in 2006.

Objective assessments of the physical environment were also linked to time children spent in sedentary behaviors. Specifically, children who lived near a large public open space with a water feature, or lived in a cul-de-sac, spent less time in front of a screen at home, whereas those who had a walking path in the park closest to their home spent more time using computers and electronic games.

The authors conclude: "Our findings suggest that while some features of the neighborhood physical environment are associated with young children spending less time watching TV and using computers and e-games outside of school hours, the presence of walking paths, for example, is associated with more time using computers and e-games in this age group. This highlights the complexity of designing communities to meet the needs of residents across the life-course."

**More information:** Veitch J et al (2011). Is the neighborhood environment associated with sedentary behavior outside of school hours among children? *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*; [DOI:10.1007/s12160-011-9260-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-011-9260-6)

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