

# Signs prove effective in prompting people to use stairs instead of elevator

January 18 2012, By Sharyn Alden

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Signs that read, "Burn Calories, Not Electricity" posted in lobbies of New York City buildings, motivated more people to take the stairs and continue to use them even months later.

A new study, which appears online in the February issue of the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#), observed and analyzed people making 18,462 trips up and down [stairs](#) at three sites. The signs immediately increased stair use between 9.2 and 34.7 percent at all locations.

“The gains in physical activity continued to be observed nine months after the signs were first placed,” noted Karen K Lee, M.D., author of the study at New York City Department of [Health](#) and Mental Hygiene.

“We found that placing stair prompts at the point of decision is effective.”

The study is among the first to assess the effects of stair prompts on stair climbing as well as descent in different types of buildings over many months. Prompts were posted in a three-story health clinic, a 10-story affordable housing building, and an 8-story academic site and studied over several months.

“Human-made environments in everyday life offer numerous opportunities for maintaining health, controlling weight and preventing disease,” Lee said. “One of those health opportunities is stair climbing, a vigorous activity which can burn more [calories](#) than jogging.”

Patrick Remington, M.D., associate dean for public health in the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine & Public Health said, “For decades, we’ve known this type of intervention works, but few, if any, places actually have these signs.”

Instead of removing the signage after the study was completed, the prompts were purposely left in place. New York City continues to promote the health benefits of [stair climbing](#) by distributing free stair signs to owners and managers of public and private buildings who request them.

“So far, we’ve distributed over 26,000 signs to owners and managers of about 1,000 buildings including residential, worksites, hospitals and academic centers,” said Lee.

Remington sees opportunities for widespread use of prompts. “For example, a zoning law could be enacted that requires buildings to have stair prompts ...like they require signs for exits.”

Remington added, “Overall, this is a great study, showing how for almost no investment we can improve health.”

**More information:** Lee, K.K. et al. (2012). Promoting Routine Stair Use Evaluating the Impact of a Stair Prompt Across Buildings. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

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