

People in neighborhoods with healthy features have better heart health

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If you live in neighborhoods with access to grocery stores, healthy food, parks and a pleasant walking environment, you're more likely to be in ideal cardiovascular health.

That's the finding of research reported at the American Heart Association's Epidemiology and Prevention/Nutrition, Physical Activity and Metabolism 2012 Scientific Sessions.

"The most significant neighborhood factors that lead to ideal health were access to recreational resources like parks and trails where people can walk in safety and comfort, and the availability of healthy foods," said Erin Unger, study author and medical student at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. "These are some of the first findings showing that your neighborhood and where you live influences your overall cardiovascular health."

The study included 6,047 participants in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis (MESA), with baseline measurements of cholesterol, [body mass index](#), diet, physical activity, fasting glucose, blood pressure and smoking.

Participants were determined as having poor, intermediate or ideal levels of seven risk factors and an overall score was determined that described their cardiovascular risk profile according to the American Heart Association's definition of ideal cardiovascular health.

Study participants with ideal cardiovascular health were more likely to be under age 55, male, Caucasian and highly educated, researchers said.

Neighborhood characteristics included favorable food stores (grocery stores and fruit/vegetable markets), unfavorable food stores (fast food restaurants, liquor stores and convenience stores) recreational facilities and resources, census measures of socioeconomic status and residents' ratings of aesthetic quality, walking environment, healthy food availability, safety and sense of community.

"This study demonstrates the importance of where we live. Our neighborhood can play a significant role in our health," Unger said.

Physical activity in neighborhoods could be improved with community gardens, healthier school lunches, parks, lights and sidewalks, she said.

Provided by American Heart Association

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