

Walking or bicycling to work influenced by others

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(Medical Xpress)—People who walk or bike to work are likely to influence their co-workers and partners to do the same, according to health researchers.

"[Social influences](#) are important, specifically interpersonal influences, such as spouses and co-workers," said Melissa Bopp, assistant professor of kinesiology, Penn State. She emphasized that community and employers also significantly influence whether people choose to actively commute.

More than 80 percent of American adults do not meet the guidelines for aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities, according to Healthy People 2020, a federal initiative that sets national objectives and monitors progress concerning the health of the population. Regardless of a chronic disease or disability, any [regular physical activity](#) can improve health and quality of life. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least two and a half hours of moderate-intensity [aerobic activity](#) a week or one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity a week for adults.

Active commuting (AC)—[physical exercise](#), such as bicycling or walking, as a way to travel to and from work—is one way to help adults integrate the recommended activity into their daily routine.

Bopp and colleagues report in the online issue of the *American Journal of Health Behavior* that married people were more likely to participate in

AC than non-married people, men actively commuted more often than women and mothers were even less likely to actively commute.

Four of the variables studied probed the connection between [interpersonal relationships](#) and AC. Having a spouse who actively commutes or co-workers who actively commute had a positive influence on the decision to do the same. The perception that a spouse would approve of AC or that co-workers would approve of AC also had a positive influence, but with slightly less impact.

However, at an individual level variables that were negatively related to active commuting included age, BMI, number of children, number of chronic diseases and number of cars in the household.

Bopp noted she was surprised to discover how many variables were significantly related to active commuting. People who were comfortable with their bicycling skills were more likely to actively commute, as were those who believed they had a shorter biking or walking time to work. Believing that an employer supports active commuting and working for an employer who supports AC, living in a community that supports AC and believing that the community is supportive of pedestrians and bicyclists were all positively significantly related to active commuting.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the researchers found that lack of on-street bike lanes, off-street bike and walking paths, and sidewalks all negatively influenced [active commuting](#). Difficult terrain, bad weather and the speed and volume of traffic along the commuting route were also significantly related to people deciding to not actively commute.

The researchers distributed surveys to 9,766 people across the mid-Atlantic States and received 1,234 viable completed surveys. The respondents were between the ages of 18 and 75, employed full- or part-

time and physically able to walk or bike to work. The participants responded to questions and statements including how they traveled to work, whether or not their spouse and coworkers influenced their choice on how they traveled to/from work, if their employer supported actively commuting, how confident they were with their cycling skills and how bicycle-friendly their community was.

The researchers did not include any questions about leisure-time activity or any other forms of physical activity participation in this study.

Moving forward, Bopp and colleagues believe that the findings of this study provide a foundation for large-scale strategies to target population-level AC patterns.

"We have to look at the complete picture and look at individual thoughts and beliefs (about AC)," said Bopp. "This is a complex problem that we need to think about at multiple levels to address influences on behavior."

Also working on this research were Andrew T. Kaczynski, assistant professor of health promotion, education and behavior, University of South Carolina, and Matthew E. Campbell, research assistant, Department of [Kinesiology](#), Penn State.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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