

Driving... a road to poor health?

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As little as two hours a day behind the wheel is a potential risk factor for a range of poor health behaviours and outcomes, a University of Sydney study has shown.

Published in *PLOS One* journal, the study of nearly 40,000 Australians aged 47-75 years found that people who drive for two hours or more per day are more likely to smoke, to be obese, and to be less physically active.

Lead author Dr Ding Ding, from the University's School of Public Health, said that "The research also reveals that people who drive for two hours or more daily are more likely to be stressed, sleep-deprived, have poorer self-rated health and quality of life.

"We found a dose-response relationship between driving time and a

clustering of health [risk behaviours](#), particularly smoking, [physical inactivity](#), and insufficient sleep. The more time people spent driving, the greater their odds of having poor health and [risk factors](#) for [poor health](#)".

People who drive more than two hours a day had 78% elevated risk of being obese, and 57% elevated risk of insufficient physical activity.

"The study's findings are relevant to middle aged and older people who drive on a daily basis, for any reason, not just professional drivers," Dr Ding said.

Elevated risks linked to driving two hours or more a day:

- 78% Obesity
- 57% Insufficient physical activity (less than 150 minutes per week)
- 86% Insufficient sleep (less than 7 hours a day)
- 43% Poor quality of life
- 33% Psychological distress

The observed link between driving time and [health risks](#) were independent of socioeconomic factors such as age, gender and education levels.

This cross-sectional study is amongst the first to examine the associations of driving time with a range of health behaviors and outcomes.

"Findings from the current study are consistent with some previous research that linked driving to cardio-metabolic health," says Dr Ding.

"However, further research is needed to confirm causality and to understand the mechanisms for the observed associations.

"This study highlights driving as a potential lifestyle risk factor for [public health](#), and future lifestyle interventions and transportation planning initiatives may consider reducing driving time as a strategy for promoting [health](#) and well-being in the community".

More information: Ding D, Gebel K, Phongsavan P, Bauman AE, Merom D (2014) "Driving: A Road to Unhealthy Lifestyles and Poor Health Outcomes." *PLoS ONE* 9(6): e94602. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0094602](#)

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