

# Walking or cycling to work improves wellbeing, researchers find

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

Walking or cycling to work is better for people's mental health than driving to work, according to new research by health economists at the University of East Anglia and the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR).

A report published today reveals that people who stopped driving and

started walking or cycling to work benefited from improved wellbeing. In particular, active [commuters](#) felt better able to concentrate and were less under strain than if they travelled by car.

These benefits come on top of the physical health benefits of walking and cycling that are already widely documented.

Experts also found that travelling on [public transport](#) is better for people's psychological wellbeing than driving.

Lead researcher Adam Martin, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said: "One surprising finding was that commuters reported feeling better when travelling by public transport, compared to driving. You might think that things like disruption to services or crowds of commuters might have been a cause of considerable stress. But as buses or trains also give people time to relax, read, socialise, and there is usually an associated walk to the bus stop or railway station, it appears to cheer people up."

The research team studied 18 years of data on almost 18,000 18-65-year-old commuters in Britain. The data allowed them to look at multiple aspects of psychological health including feelings of worthlessness, unhappiness, sleepless nights, and being unable to face problems. The researchers also accounted for numerous factors known to affect wellbeing, including income, having children, moving house or job, and relationship changes.

The study also shows commute time to be important.

Adam Martin said: "Our study shows that the longer people spend commuting in cars, the worse their psychological wellbeing. And correspondingly, people feel better when they have a longer walk to work."

Data from the 2011 Census (England and Wales) shows that 67.1 per cent of commuters use cars or vans as their usual main commute mode compared to 17.8 per cent who use public transport, 10.9 per cent who walk and just 3.1 per cent who cycle.

"This research shows that if new projects such as London's proposed segregated cycleways, or public transport schemes such as Crossrail, were to encourage commuters to walk or cycle more regularly, then there could be noticeable [mental health](#) benefits."

The new report contradicts a UK Office of National Statistics study 'Commuting and Personal Wellbeing, 2014', published in February, which found people who walked to work had lower life satisfaction than those who drove to work, while many cyclists were less happy and more anxious than other commuters. Crucially, this new research looks at commuters who had changed travel mode from one year to the next, rather than comparing commuters who were using different travel modes at a single point in time.

**More information:** 'Does active commuting improve psychological wellbeing? Longitudinal evidence from eighteen waves of the British Household Panel Survey' is published in the journal *Preventive Medicine* on Monday, September 15.

Provided by University of East Anglia

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