

Study finds lives and money to be saved from incidental exercise

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

A Melbourne study has found that incidental physical activity from active transport, such as walking to catch the train to work or cycling to the shops, can save lives and money.

The results of the study, conducted by Melbourne GP Margaret Beavis with Deakin University Population Health Professor Marj Moodie,

suggest that hundreds of lives and millions of [health](#) sector dollars could be saved from the minutes of incidental exercise associated with active transport, ie transport-related walking and cycling.

"Giving people a choice whether they take [public transport](#), walk, cycle or drive has major impacts on health outcomes, both at an individual level and for the whole population," Dr Beavis said.

"The World Health Organisation declared physical activity a "best buy" in 2012 when it comes to disease prevention, because 30 minutes exercise daily significantly improves outcomes in so many diseases and reduces premature death rates by 20-22 per cent.

"Making active transport an easy option would go a long way to turning the tide on Australia's rapidly rising levels of diabetes and other health issues such as depression and dementia."

The study analysed the daily travel patterns and incidental physical activity, such as the time spent walking to get to transport, of over 29,000 people in Melbourne. The results showed car drivers averaged 8 - 10 minutes of incidental exercise daily, public transport users 35 minutes daily, and walkers/cyclists 38 minutes daily. People in the inner city were found to be more than six times more likely to get sufficient physical activity from travel compared with people living in the outer suburbs.

The researchers also looked at the health implications (deaths and disability) of this incidental physical activity.

Conservative economic modelling found the incidental physical activity could result in 272 less deaths per year, 903 fewer new cases of disease and savings of up to \$12.2 million in the health sector and \$22.9 million in lost production.

"Overall, the study showed that public transport users, walkers, cyclists and those living closer to the city centre were more likely to get enough travel-related physical activity to gain significant health benefits, with these people easily getting the recommended 30 minutes of exercise a day just from incidental physical activity," Dr Beavis said.

"Governments have to make choices about public transport and road building, so it is important the health of the community and economic savings are factored in. This study provides valuable information to guide government decision making."

The study, 'Incidental [physical activity](#) in Melbourne, Australia: health and economic impacts of mode of transport and suburban location', is published in the December 2014 issue of the Health Promotion Journal of Australia.

More information: "Incidental physical activity in Melbourne, Australia: health and economic impacts of mode of transport and suburban location." *Health Promot J Austr.* 2014 Dec;25(3):174-81. [DOI: 10.1071/HE14057](https://doi.org/10.1071/HE14057).

Provided by Deakin University

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