

Moving to a walking neighborhood is good for your blood pressure

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Image: Imperial College London

People who moved from a neighborhood that required a vehicle to run errands to one that made walking-errands convenient were significantly less likely to have high blood pressure than people who moved from one low-walkability neighborhood to another low-walkability neighborhood, according to research presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2015.

To determine a neighborhood's walking friendliness, researchers used Walk Score, which rates [neighborhoods](#) from 1 to 100 for accessibility by foot to stores, parks, schools and other destinations. "Walker's Paradise" neighborhoods received a score of 90 or greater. Walk Score is an open-access walkability index available at <http://www.walkscore.com>.

This is the first study to determine whether moving to a walking-friendly neighborhood affected blood pressure. Researchers compared 1,057 pairs of adults from the Canadian Community Health Survey (2001 to 2010), who moved from a low walkability neighborhood to either a high walkability or another low walkability neighborhood in Ontario, Canada. Blood-pressure data was obtained from linked health administrative databases held and analyzed at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences and patients were monitored for up to 10 years.

Researchers found that people who moved to a walking-friendly neighborhood had a 54 percent lower risk of [high blood pressure](#) than people who left one walking-unfriendly neighborhood for another.

High blood pressure is one of the main risk factors for heart disease—the leading cause of death in the United States—and for stroke, which is the fifth-leading cause of death. Studies show that an active lifestyle can help reduce the risk of all three of these diseases. For most healthy adults, the American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise, like walking, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity (or a combination of both) each week as part of a heart-healthy lifestyle called My Life Check™- Life's Simple 7.

"We need to set people up for success by making walking instead of driving the more convenient and enjoyable choice," said lead author Maria Chiu, M.Sc, Ph.D, a scientist at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. "Urban planners and policymakers can do their part by designing neighborhoods that are more pedestrian-friendly."

Researchers noted that they did not have detailed dietary data other than fruit and vegetable consumption, which could affect [blood pressure](#).

Provided by American Heart Association

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