

# Neighbourhood affects the healthiness of dietary choices

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A new study shows that living or moving to a neighbourhood with a higher socioeconomic status is clearly associated with better adherence to dietary recommendations. Researchers studied the connection

between neighbourhoods' socioeconomic status and dietary choices from data covering over 16,000 Finnish adults.

Researchers from the University of Turku, Finland, studied how the [neighbourhood](#)'s [socioeconomic status](#) affects people's adherence to national dietary recommendations. Dietary habits were reported with a short survey and, on the basis of the answers, the researchers formed an index which describes the correspondence between eating habits and national dietary recommendations.

Information on the neighbourhood socioeconomic status was linked to the participants with address coordinates using the national grid database of Statistics Finland. The database contains information that is based on all Finnish residents on social and economic characteristics at the level of 250 m x 250 m grids.

"The socioeconomic well-being of the neighbourhood was measured with [education level](#), household income, and unemployment rate. The results were independent of the participants' own education level, [economic situation](#), [marital status](#) and health," says lead author, Docent Hanna Lagström from the Public Health unit of the University of Turku.

Half of the participants had lived in the same address for the entire six-year follow-up. The same phenomenon was discovered among those who had moved to the neighbourhood and those who had lived there the entire time: people living in a neighbourhood with a lower socioeconomic status had a lower score in the food index than those living in a more prosperous neighbourhood.

"Of the single food items, people living in neighbourhoods with a higher socioeconomic status ate sausage, meat, fish and vegetables according to recommendations, whereas people in the less prosperous neighbourhoods more often adhered to the recommendations concerning dark bread and

consuming alcohol. The consumption of non-fat milk, fruits and berries did not correlate with the neighbourhood socioeconomic status," explains Lagström.

She finds it especially interesting that people who moved to a neighbourhood with a higher socioeconomic status ate more healthily than those who moved to a less prosperous neighbourhood.

"This could implicate that neighbourhoods can offer a very different selection of food items and therefore narrow the opportunities to improve one's diet or to follow the recommendations."

The study "Neighborhood socioeconomic status and adherence to [dietary recommendations](#) among Finnish adults: a retrospective follow-up study" was published in the *Health & Place* journal. The authors of the publication are Hanna Lagström, Jaana I. Halonen, Ichiro Kawachi, Sari Stenholm, Jaana Pentti, Sakari Suominen, Mika Kivimäki and Jussi Vahtera.

**More information:** Hanna Lagström et al. Neighborhood socioeconomic status and adherence to dietary recommendations among Finnish adults: A retrospective follow-up study, *Health & Place* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2018.10.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2018.10.007)

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