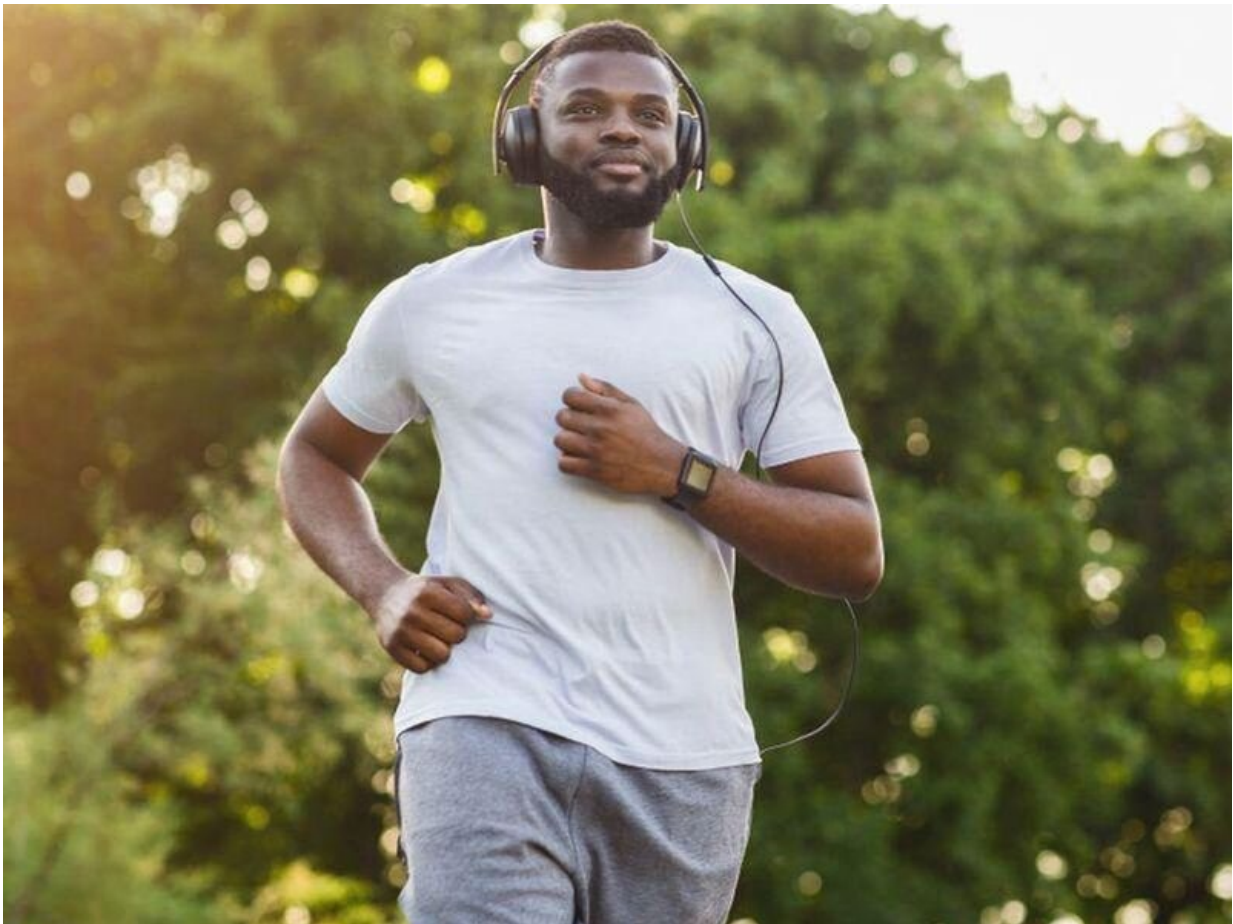


# Do you live in America's fittest city? Experts rank best to worst

July 12 2022, By Denise Mann

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Want to get fit and stay fit? Arlington, Va., may be the city for you: For

the fifth year in a row, it has been named the fittest city in America.

Meanwhile, the title of the least fit city goes to Oklahoma City, according to the [annual fitness rankings](#) of America's 100 [largest cities](#) from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)/Elevance Health Foundation's American Fitness Index.

This year, the Index included 34 indicators of personal and [community health](#) (think exercise, sleep, chronic disease, parks, playgrounds, bike paths, safe streets and more), with an emphasis on how physical activity affects [mental health](#) due to widespread reports that the ongoing pandemic took a toll on mental health.

"Arlington, Va., was ranked as the fittest city, with a score of 85 out of a possible 100," said Amanda Paluch, a physical activity epidemiologist at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a member of the American Fitness Index Advisory Board. By contrast, Oklahoma City's score was 20.1.

"Arlington had the highest proportion of residents exercising in the previous month and the lowest rates of high blood pressure, stroke and diabetes," Paluch explained, and it also has lots of [parks](#) and recreational facilities.

In contrast, "Oklahoma City ranks among the lowest in these indicators, with higher rates of [chronic disease](#) and less availability of community parks and recreation that can support active living," Paluch said.

The top five fittest cities in America are:

1. Arlington, Va.
2. Madison, Wis.

3. Minneapolis
4. Washington, D.C.
5. Seattle

The five *least* fit cities are:

- Louisville, Ky.
- Indianapolis
- Tulsa, Okla.
- North Las Vegas, Nev.
- Oklahoma City

Wondering where your city ranks? Check [here](#).

When it comes to mental health, things were bleak: Close to 40% of residents in all of the 100 Fitness Index cities reported poor mental health. Cities reporting the highest rates of poor mental health included New Orleans; Laredo, Texas; San Francisco; Washington, D.C.; San Jose, Calif.; Madison, Wis.; Lubbock, Texas; Stockton, Calif.; Riverside, Calif.; and Cincinnati.

Poor [mental health](#) and lack of physical activity often travel together, [fitness](#) experts noted.

"Mental health issues can contribute to chronic disease and sedentary lifestyles," said Stella Volpe. She is a nutritionist and exercise physiologist at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Va., and chair of the American Fitness Index Advisory Board. "Fortunately, physical activity, even in small amounts, can reduce symptoms of [anxiety](#) and [depression](#), and improve mood and self-esteem."

The good news is the ratings aren't set in stone and provide a road map

for cities looking to get fitter. For example, Tampa, Fla., has jumped from 57 to 25 in the rankings, thanks to increases in exercise, sleep and the number of folks reporting excellent/very good health and lower rates of heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

More good news: There was an increase in the percentage of Americans exercising in the previous month, sleeping 7+ hours/day, and reporting excellent or very [good health](#), compared to last year's Fitness Index.

Cities can improve their rankings on the Fitness Index in multiple ways, Paluch noted.

"One way could be ... increasing the number and access to parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities or taking the steps to make your city more pedestrian-friendly for both walking and biking," she said.

Healthy living must be the easy choice, Paluch said. "Clean air to breathe while outside; safe and accessible walking paths and sidewalks; playgrounds within walking distance from families' homes, are examples of ways cities can support healthy living," she added.

But don't expect these changes to happen overnight. "Although slow, it will lead to improvements in your residents' health, quality of life and overall vitality of your city," Paluch said.

Expect other dividends, she said. Fit cities create stronger community ties and improve the quality of life of the residents.

"Cities that are well-designed to promote physical activity have [economic benefits](#) as well, such as increased home values, business and job growth, and an influx of new residents," she said. "It also can reduce [health care costs](#), where every \$1 invested in building trails for walking and biking saves nearly \$3 in [health care costs](#)."

The Fitness Index has expanded from 50 to 100 cities, so comparisons to the first 10 years aren't feasible. Residents and city leaders can compare their city's indicators from 2018 to 2022, but not the overall rank or score.

**More information:** Find out how your city [compares](#) to Arlington, Va., or other cities.

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