

Walkable neighborhoods help adults socialize and increase community, study finds

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Adults who live in walkable neighborhoods are more likely to interact with their neighbors and have a stronger sense of community than people who live in car-dependent communities, report researchers at the

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science at University of California San Diego.

The findings of the study, published online in the journal *Health & Place*, support one of six foundational pillars suggested by United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy as part of a national strategy to address a public health crisis caused by loneliness, isolation and lack of connection in this country.

In May 2023, the [Surgeon General Advisory](#) stated that loneliness and isolation can lead to a 29% increased risk of heart disease, a 32% increased risk of stroke, a 50% increased risk of developing dementia among [older adults](#), and increases risk of premature death by more than 60%.

To address this [public health crisis](#), the Surgeon General recommends strengthening [social infrastructure](#) by designing environments that promote connection.

"Our built environments create or deny long-lasting opportunities for socialization, [physical activity](#), contact with nature, and other experiences that affect public health," said James F. Sallis, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor at the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and senior author of the UC San Diego study.

"Transportation and land use policies across the U.S. have strongly prioritized car travel and suburban development, so millions of Americans live in neighborhoods where they must drive everywhere, usually alone, and have little or no chance to interact with their neighbors."

Walkable neighborhoods promote active behaviors like walking for leisure or transportation to school, work, shopping or home.

The study analyzed data from the Neighborhood Quality of Life Study, which included 1,745 adults ages 20 to 66 living in 32 neighborhoods located in and around Seattle, Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

Neighborhood walkability may promote social interactions with neighbors—like waving hello, asking for help or socializing in their homes, said the first author, Jacob R. Carson, M.P.H., a student in the UC San Diego—San Diego State University Joint Doctoral Program in Public Health. Carson began the research while a Master of Public Health student at the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health.

Neighborhoods where people must drive in and out, and where there is an absence of gathering places, may have the opposite effect, preventing neighbors from socializing.

"Promoting [social interaction](#) is an important [public health](#) goal. Understanding the role of neighborhood design bolsters our ability to advocate for the health of our communities and the individuals who reside in them," said Carson.

"Fewer traffic incidents, increases in physical activity, and better neighborhood social health outcomes are just a few of the results of designing [walkable neighborhoods](#) that can enrich our lives."

More information: Jacob R. Carson et al, Neighborhood walkability, neighborhood social health, and self-selection among U.S. adults, *Health & Place* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2023.103036](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2023.103036)

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