

UK
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Health Education
through
Extension Leadership

WHAT IS THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT?

The built environment includes all of the physical aspects of where we live and work. This includes homes, buildings (such as schools, workplaces, shopping centers, and health clubs), streets, and open spaces.

WHY BE CONCERNED WITH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT?

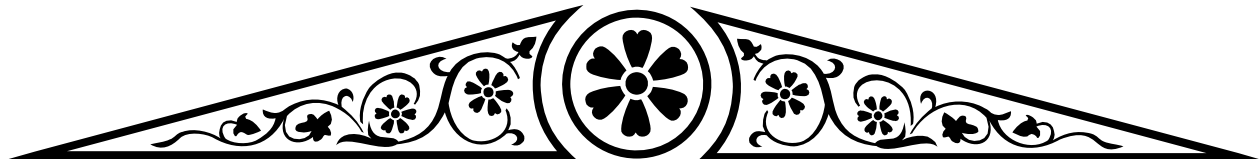
The way a community is designed can affect a person's health and well-being. Over the past 30 years there has been an

increase in the number of individuals who are overweight and obese. Today, approximately two thirds of Americans are overweight. A person's diet and his or her level of physical activity are main causes of this problem. The area where you live can make it difficult to be physically active. Living an inactive lifestyle leads to diseases such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer. Living in a community where the built environment makes it easier to be physically active might improve your health.



FACTORS in the built environment that make it easier to be physically active:

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- A 3D-style illustration of a clipboard with a blue clip and a yellow sheet of paper. The paper contains a list of factors in black text.
- Sidewalks, trails, or walking paths clear of hanging shrubs
 - Well lighted streets
 - Little traffic
 - Little threat of crime
 - Leashed and fenced dogs
 - Clean streets
 - Desirable scenery



From 1960 to the present there have been many changes in the built environment and in our lifestyles. At the present time, people depend more on cars as their means of transport. This is because they live farther away from places where they work, shop, or have fun. These factors reduce the amount of time individuals have for recreation after work, to engage in physical activity, or for community involvement. Living in an area where you can walk to work or to school or to run errands can increase opportunities for physical activity.

EVALUATE YOUR COMMUNITY TO SEE IF IT IS HEALTH FRIENDLY

The layout of our communities can help or hinder opportunities for physical activity and health. Here is a checklist that you can use to evaluate the health friendliness of your community.

Do the people in my community have opportunities to be physically active?

Are there safe places for children to play?

Can people walk or bike safely around the community or run errands e.g., to the store, pharmacy, library, post office?

Are schools located close enough to homes so that kids can walk or bike to school, and do so safely?

Can kids in my community ride safely or walk to school?

Are home and schools in my community safe and free from hazards?

Are there adequate sidewalks and safe cross walks?

Do buildings, streets, open spaces and infrastructure in my community promote physical activity for all Individuals—children, adults, elderly, and those with disabilities.

Do residents have access to affordable medical and preventive health service?

Do residents have access to healthy food they can afford?

Is lead or mold an issue in homes and schools in my community?

Is the water and air in my community clean?

SOURCES

CDC Environmental Health Fact Sheet: Impact of the Built Environment on Health. <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/publications/factsheets/ImpactoftheBuiltEnvironmentonHealth.pdf>

Creating a Healthy Environment: The Impact of the Built Environment on Public Health. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/articles/Creating%20A%20Healthy%20Environment.pdf>

What is the built environment and how does it influence health? <http://www.apha.org/NR/rdonlyres/4E8C267F-9609-4E2E-B916-8ECC73E31C4B/0/whatBuiltEnvironment.pdf>

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