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Do Walkable Neighborhoods Promote Physical Activity?

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A sedentary and inactive lifestyle has become prevalent among a large portion of the world's population. There are different statistics on the level of inactivity of people in different countries (1). The American Society of Surgeons recommends that at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity be performed daily for at least five days a week to ensure the minimum physical health of citizens (2).

Walking is the most common and accessible type of physical activity that can be used by all age groups. Walking as a behavior is caused by various individual, social, economic and environmental factors. In the meantime, the environment is very important because it includes the whole society. Therefore, identifying the environmental factors affecting people's walking and using it in the design of residential areas can lead to increased physical activity and ultimately lead to the promotion of public health (3).

Walk ability means the ability to walk in one place. The walkable neighborhoods provides a pleasant and attractive space for pedestrians with a feeling of comfort, convenience and security; This vibrant place with an interconnected network of streets, convenient access routes to a variety of destinations and the presence of different age and gender groups (4).

But many cities and towns are modern, car-dependent, and are designed to provide faster and better access to cars (5). This has led to a strong dependence of urban life on cars, leading to sedentary citizens, overweight and obesity, reduced social interactions with neighbors, depression and physical inactivity. Recent research and findings, especially in industrialized countries, have sounded the alarm about urban life patterns (2, 5, 6).

The researchers found that people living in scattered, secluded and marginalized areas were at risk for chronic diseases due to excessive use of cars, lack of exercise and even very little daily walking (7). Statistics show that the physical design of walkable neighborhoods is completely different from the physical design of car-dependent neighborhoods, and residents of walkable neighborhoods have higher scores in terms of health indicators (2, 4, 5).

Neighborhoods have safety against crime, riding and pedestrian accidents, and have normal and light traffic. In such a neighborhood, cars drive at the lowest possible speed and private passengers

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have no way to cross the local streets, but pedestrians can easily access all parts of the neighborhood. The open and green spaces of the pedestrian areas are visible to the residents and criminal groups cannot be present there. Instead, vulnerable groups such as children, teenagers, housewives and the elderly can attend outdoor spaces freely and in groups. Residents and neighbors of pedestrian neighborhoods face each other in their daily lives and can participate in the neighborhood's social affairs and promote the neighborhood's social capital by forming local and neighborhood groups (1).

Walkable neighborhoods are neighborhoods where efficient and wide sidewalks are designed, there are children's and old parks, the connection of roads and network of streets, the existence of tree-lined paths and flowered paths, the existence of sufficient car parking lots along the service lines (8). And commercial, sanitary and continuous cleaning of open spaces, lighting and urban furniture such as the presence of old platforms and shaded porches, the existence of residential, commercial, cultural and sports uses in the neighborhood, medium and high residential density in the neighborhood and the existence of various residential units such as apartments and single units (9). The presence of a thriving neighborhood center that is accessible on foot and eliminates the need for people to visit other neighborhoods by car daily is of special interest (4).

In contrast to People living in car-friendly neighborhoods are deprived of face-to-face contact with locals, and sometimes even neighbors do not know each other for years. Research shows that living in secluded and marginalized neighborhoods, and even living in high-rise residential towers, reduces the physical activity of residents, especially children, and leads to behavioral problems. Respiratory diseases, social disorders and social isolation are also possible in children living in residential towers (8).

In general, Living in a walkable neighborhood does not mean not having or not using a car, but designing streets and houses and setting up shops and providing daily services in a way that can naturally motivate people to exercise physically and socially during their daily lives.

Keywords

Walkable, neighborhood, physical activity

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