

Get Moving, Missouri!

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Promoting Physical Activity in Missouri

Despite clear evidence showing the benefits of being physically active, most Americans fail to meet recommended guidelines. What can be done to increase physical activity among Missouri residents?

Introduction

Inadequate physical activity is a key risk factor for a variety of chronic conditions, including overweight and obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. The health burden of these conditions is substantial. For example, cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a leading cause of illness and death in the United States, accounting for more than 910,000 deaths and 6 million hospitalizations each year (1). Physical activity is a risk factor for CVD (1, 2), but also influences other risk factors for the disease, including body weight (3-5). Many Missouri residents are overweight or obese. The prevalence of overweight varies by gender and ethnic group; recently, it was highest for African American women, at 33.6%, compared to white women and men (6).

Recommendations

- Further investigations of the built environment should be undertaken to examine the specific features of the physical environment that are most closely tied to increased activity.
- Community programs should be implemented in conjunction with improvements in neighborhood environments to foster social support.
- Future interventions that enlist the support of community leaders in devising and implementing strategies for neighborhood- or community-wide physical activity should be undertaken, and community leaders should be encouraged to take the lead in efforts that support an activity-friendly local environment.

The Challenge

Most people fail to meet the recommended guidelines of at least 30 minutes of activity on at least 5 days per week (3). What can be done to address this issue? One promising area of physical activity research is that of the built environment. This term refers to patterns of land use, design features, and transportation systems in an environment, which collectively influence the opportunities people have to be physically active and to travel (7). Recent studies suggest that changing people's surrounding environment may influence physical activity (7).

Physical activity in Missouri: Where do we stand?

According to 2005 data, 36% of youth in Missouri met physical activity guidelines. Based on 2003 data, 52.5% of adults in Missouri achieved recommended activity levels (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2004).



Recent Research

Researchers have long known that changes in physical environment are, in large part, responsible for the sedentary lifestyle that is harming our health (8). An ecological model for recent research on the built environment illustrates how the social environment, built environment, and individual factors determine physical activity and, ultimately, health (7). While some many characteristics that influence physical activity cannot be changed, such as societal values, economic factors, biological factors, and time, changes in the built environment are feasible offer an important opportunity to decrease barriers to physical activity. The built environment examines factors at the building or site, neighborhood, and regional levels.

Building characteristics include structural layout and stairways. Neighborhood features include sidewalks, parks, bike paths, and street layout. And finally, regional features include such characteristics as transportation, supply, size, and population distribution (7). Current studies aim to determine the specific features of the built environment that influence activity (9). Other promising research has examined the effect of interventions that promote physical activity at multiple levels simultaneously multiple levels simultaneously (10, 11, 12). Researchers believe that multi-level interventions will prove successful where other single-faceted interventions have failed.

Social Environment: Societal preferences and values, policies, economic factors

Built Environment: Patterns of land use, design features, and transportation systems

Individual Factors: Demographic, lifestyle, and household characteristics, culture, genetic and biological factors, preferences, time

Physical Activity

Health

Findings

- Physical changes to the environment combined with behavioral and social interventions can produce desired changes in physical activity levels (9).
- In a group exercise intervention conducted with in low- to middle-income urban, African American women, subjects cited the availability of exercise equipment and the supportive group environment as the reasons for their successful adherence (11).
- Greater access to safe neighborhood parks resulted in increased physical activity (12).

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