Personal, family, social, and environmental correlates of active commuting to school.

American Journal of Preventive Medicine

Volume 30, Issue 1, January 2006, Pages 45-51

Research article

Personal, Family, Social, and Environmental Correlates of Active Commuting to School

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2005.08.047

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Background

Active commuting to school may be an important opportunity for children to accumulate adequate physical activity for improved cardiovascular risk factors, enhanced bone health, and psychosocial well-being. The purpose of this study was to examine personal, family, social, and environmental correlates of active commuting to school among children.

Methods

Cross-sectional study of 235 children aged 5 to 6 years and 677 children aged 10 to 12 years from 19 elementary schools in Melbourne, Australia. Self-administered questionnaires were completed by parents, and the older children. The shortest possible routes to school were examined using a geographic information system.

Results
Among both age groups, negative correlates of active commuting to school included parental perception of few other children in the neighborhood and no lights or crossings for their child to use, and an objectively assessed busy road barrier en route to school. In younger children, an objectively assessed steep incline en route to school was negatively associated with walking or cycling to school. Good connectivity en route to school was negatively associated with walking or cycling to school among older children. Among both age groups, children were more likely to actively commute to school if their route was <800 meters. There were no associations with perceived energy levels or enjoyment of physical activity, weight status, or family factors.

Conclusions

For children, creating child-friendly communities and providing skills to safely negotiate the environment may be important. Environmental correlates of active transport in children and adults may differ and warrant further investigation.
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