Urban Forestry/Urban Greening Research

Green Cities: Good Health

summaries of scientific research about human health and well-being and urban nature experiences

Active Living

Influences of Parks, Open Spaces, and City Trees on Active Lifestyles

The U.S. and other nations face a health crisis. Obesity is a contributor to chronic diseases that lead to prolonged illnesses and disabilities, and is causing an epidemic of poor health in adults and children. Inactive lifestyles contribute to obesity and poor health. Change of diet and medication can help, but daily moderate activity is essential for weight control. Recent research indicates that quality outdoor environments affect activity attitudes and behaviors. Urban greening contributes to more walkable places. Trees and other greening elements can encourage physical activity.

Research Highlights:

- 65% of U.S. adults are overweight and one in three are obese, putting them at increased risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, Type II diabetes, arthritis, cancer, and resulting in billions of dollars in annual medical costs. (CDC-Overweight and Obesity, 2012)
- Moderate physical activity, such as 30 minutes of brisk walking 5 days a week, reduces health risks. 50% of U.S. adults do not get enough activity; 24% are not active at all during their leisure time. (CDC Physical Activity Statistics, 2007)
- The character of a neighborhood has a significant affect on residents' physical activity. People in communities with abundant greenspace generally enjoy better health. (Maas et al., 2006, Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health)
- People who use parks and open spaces are three times more likely to achieve recommended levels of physical activity than nonusers. People prefer nearby, attractive, and larger parks and open spaces for their activity. (Giles-Corti et al., 2005. American Journal of Preventive Medicine)
- Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Active living is one solution to turn back this trend. Tree lawns contribute to perceptions of more walkable streets, which can promote more physical activity in children and youth. (Naderi and Kim, 2006, CSLA/CELA 2006 Congress Proceedings)
- In one study elderly people that had nearby parks, tree-lined streets, and space for taking walks showed higher longevity over a 5-year study period. (Takano et al., 2002, Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health)

More information at: www.greenhealth.washington.edu

Additional social science about urban parks, trees, and greenspace for physical activity and health can be found at the Green Cities: Good Health web site (including research sources).

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