**Greening the Commute: Active Commuting and Health**

Anju Felix, NJMS Class of 2029

Active commuting includes walking, cycling, or skating to reach a destination. When done safely, active commuting can be a low-cost opportunity to improve health and the environment. Transportation is a major source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which contribute to climate change and poor air quality. Overall, transportation produces 28% of the US's total GHG emissions.[1] Choosing active commuting when possible can help reduce emissions, with each mile reducing transportation-related GHG emissions by 37-51%.[2] Vehicular transportation also contributes to noise pollution in our communities, especially in urban settings.[3.] Chronic exposure to increased noise levels has been linked to negative health outcomes, including poor cardiovascular health.[4] Although the EPA has established noise-emission standards and encourages noise-compatible city planning[5], we can still play a part in reducing noise pollution through active commuting

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Active commuting not only keeps the planet healthy, but can also improve our personal health. The American College of Sports Medicine and CDC recommend moderate cardio for 150 minutes weekly for adults[6] and moderate- or high-intensity activity for 420 minutes a week for school-aged children.[7] Active commuting can contribute to these thresholds and support heart and bone health, weight maintenance, and overall well-being.[7]

**How to do it safely**

- Use sidewalks and designated crossings whenever available.
- Avoid distractions while walking or biking.
- Stop, look, and listen for traffic before crossing streets.
- Make eye contact with drivers when crossing or turning.
- Wear a properly fitted helmet when biking.
- Ride in the same direction as traffic and use hand signals when turning.
- Choose routes with protected bike lanes or lower traffic volume when possible.
- Practice a "defensive" mindset and do not assume drivers can always see pedestrians or cyclists.

Lastly, not all communities have equal access to safe infrastructure. In these circumstances, families should choose the safest available routes based on their local environment and can meet daily activity goals in other ways. Even small changes, such as parking farther from your destination, walking between errands, or taking the stairs when available, can increase physical activity. Ultimately, creating walkable, well-connected neighborhoods will require community investment and advocacy with local representatives, school boards, and transportation departments.

References


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