

Walking And Cycling Have Increased In The United States But Remain At Low Levels: Better Infrastructure And Targeted Programs Needed

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A new study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* reports a significant increase in walking between 2001 and 2009 in the United States, but only slight growth in cycling.

A team of researchers from Rutgers University, Virginia Tech and the University of Sydney assessed changes in walking and cycling in the United States between 2001 and 2009. They used the 2001 and 2009 National Household Travel Surveys to compute the frequency, duration and distance of walking and cycling per capita. They found that the average American made 17 more walk trips in 2009 than in 2001, covering 9 more miles per year, compared with just 2 more bike trips, and 5 more miles of cycling. They merged the population-weighted person and trip files to calculate prevalence of any walking and cycling and of walking and cycling at least 30 minutes per day. While the prevalence of "any walking" in the population remained unchanged, walking at least 30 minutes per day increased from 7.2 percent to 8.0 percent. The prevalence of "any cycling" in the population remained at 1.7 percent, and the prevalence of "30 minute cycling" remained at 0.9 percent. Changes in active travel between 2001 and 2009 were not equally distributed across population subgroups. Active travel declined for women, children and seniors, but increased among men, the middle aged, employed, well-educated and persons without a car. That suggests important problems of social inequities in active travel.

The analysis confirmed the important role of public transport in encouraging active travel. With 90 percent of all public transport trips involving walk trips at both ends, policy packages for encouraging active travel should include safe and convenient pedestrian access to public transport stops. Cycling also has the potential to be an important access mode to public transport.

The study's authors conclude, "In designing the right mix of policies, it is important to target women, children and seniors, who are the most vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists and require special attention to protect them from the dangers of motor vehicle traffic. Improved infrastructure for walking and cycling should be combined with educational and promotional programs to help encourage the necessary behavior change toward a more active lifestyle."

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