

# Primary Prevention and the Physical Environment

## Primary Prevention

Primary prevention seeks to avert the occurrence of a disease or injury. It includes clean water and air, safe and nutritious food, safe home and work environments, violence-free communities, safe transportation systems, and a public educated in the pursuit of good health. Evidence clearly demonstrates the health benefits and economic value of primary prevention. The impact of benefit and value is greatest when prevention is implemented at the earliest opportunity.

The physical environment is an important component of primary prevention.

## What is it?

The physical environment includes the natural environment and the “built environment”—the environment resulting from structures built by humans.

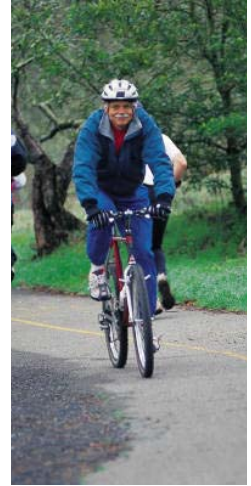
## Why is it important?

Living in an environment that encourages exercise and physical activity helps keep people healthy. It is an important aspect of primary prevention, especially in light of the increasing rates of overweight and obesity in the population. Being overweight or obese increases the risk for Type II diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and other health problems. The physical environment is critical to maintaining and improving health through increasing opportunities for safe exercise and physical activity.

## What can we do?

Components of the built environment include housing, transportation systems, land-use, and infrastructure. Planning, design and construction of built environments should facilitate and enable residents to exercise safely within their communities. For example, sidewalk construction and maintenance, along with street design, traffic patterns and urban landscapes that present few pedestrian obstacles encourage walking. Dedicated bike lanes and marked bike routes encourage recreational and commuter biking. Safe access to playgrounds and parks encourages exercise among children and youth.

We can all increase our activity levels and encourage our families to do likewise. We can also work within our communities to encourage our neighbors to exercise and be physically active, raise awareness of the health benefits of exercise, and promote development of exercise-friendly cities, towns, and neighborhoods.



**For more information:** Return to the UCONN Center for Public Health and Health Policy homepage: [http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/aboutus\\_hp.php](http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/aboutus_hp.php)

More information on Health and the Physical Environment can be found at the following website: <http://www.commissiononhealth.org/HealthyPlaces.aspx>