Neighborhood linked to obesity

Children lacking nearby parks, supermarkets at higher risk

By Nathan Seppa

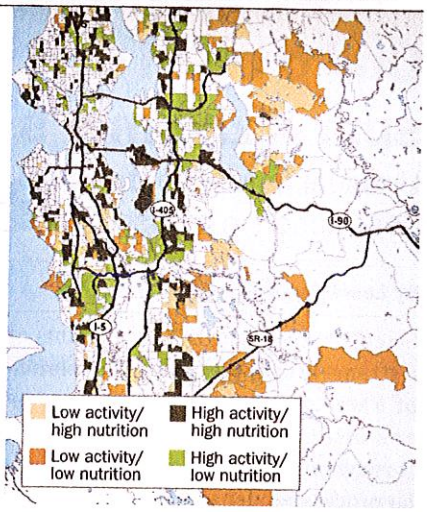
Neighborhood amenities such as green space and a nearby grocery store may offer residents more than just curb appeal. Children who live in such neighborhoods are roughly half as likely to be obese as kids living in areas lacking these features, researchers report in two studies in the May *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Lawrence Frank, an urban planner and public health researcher at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and his colleagues considered the "built environment" in hundreds of neighborhoods in San Diego County, Calif., and King County, Wash., which includes Seattle. Researchers rated the number and quality of parks and a neighborhood's "walkability" — whether it had a low level of sprawl, few cul-de-sacs and easy access to retail outlets.

The scientists gauged the nutrition component of the built environment by noting the presence or absence, within a half mile, of a store that sold fresh fruits and vegetables. The number of fast food outlets in that range counted as a negative.

The researchers also collected health information on 681 children randomly identified in the two counties and scored each child's neighborhood amenities.

In neighborhoods with high physical activity and nutrition scores, less than 8 percent of children ages 6 to 11 were obese, compared with nearly 16 percent in places scoring poorly on both measures. Even after accounting for sex, race, ethnicity, parents' income, parents' body mass index, parents' employment status and other factors, children in high-scoring neighborhoods were 59 percent less likely to be obese than those in poorly rated areas.



Neighborhoods in Seattle (shown) and San Diego that ranked high for features promoting physical activity and good nutrition had lower childhood obesity than neighborhoods with lower scores.

"This is a very promising area of research that will inform the way we think about cities and how to design neighborhoods," says Jennifer Black, a nutritionist at the University of British Columbia who wasn't involved in these studies.

Autism drug has effects in mice

Compound curbs repetitive behavior, boosts sociability

By Laura Sanders

An experimental drug eases two of the core behavioral symptoms of autism spectrum disorders in adult mice, a new study shows. A single injection curbed repetitive behaviors and improved sociability, researchers report in the April 25 *Science Translational Medicine*.

Although it's too soon to say whether the drug will work in people with autism, similar medicines are already being tested in humans for a related neurological condition known as fragile X syndrome. "This may be a case where you have a mouse finding that can actually lead to human studies in a fairly short amount of time," says psychiatrist and molecular neuroscientist Jeremy Veenstra-VanderWeele of Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

No currently available drugs treat the core features of autism spectrum disorders — impaired social interactions, communication problems and repetitive behaviors, says study coauthor Jill Silverman of the National Institute of Mental Health in Bethesda, Md. She and her colleagues focused on two kinds of inbred mice with unusual behaviors. One repetitively grooms, doesn't interact with other mice normally and squeaks less than others. The second jumps up to 50 times a minute.

In a test of sociability, mice receiving an experimental drug sniffed around a strange new mouse (in cage) more than untreated animals.

About half an hour after receiving a dose of the compound, known as GRN-529, the animals' pathological grooming and jumping lessened, the team found. Some signs of abnormal social behavior improved, too. Coauthors at Pfizer saw similar results in tests at their Groton, Conn., lab. "For the repetitive behaviors, it was a really strong finding," Silverman says.

The drug works by interfering with a protein in nerve cells called mGluR5, which detects the brain chemical glutamate. Researchers are growing increasingly interested in drugs targeting mGluR5.

FROM TOP: L.D. FRANK *ET AL/AM J PREV MED* 2012; MU YANG, JACQUELINE CRAWLEY/NIMH LABORATORY OF BEHAVIORAL NEUROSCIENCE

Submitted by Brad Pass

From: Patricia Mullen
To: Council Comment
Subject: Park plan
Date: Monday, April 25, 2016 8:57:01 AM

I support the Goodman/Johnson plan with a reasonable compromise if necessary.

Not crazy about a referendum.

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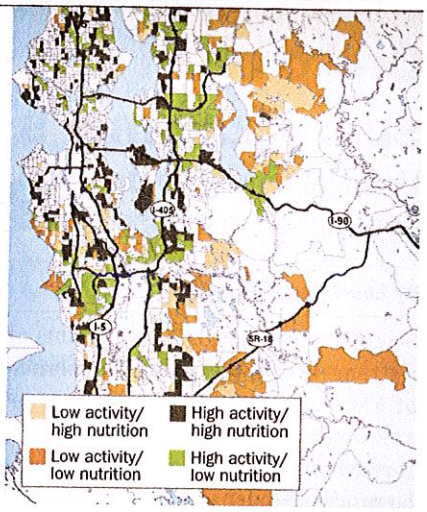

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