

Increasing walking: how important is distance to, attractiveness, and size of public open space.

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Increasing walking: How important is distance to, attractiveness, and size of public open space?

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Background

Well-designed public open space (POS) that encourages physical activity is a community asset that could potentially contribute to the health of local residents.

Methods

In 1995–1996, two studies were conducted—an environmental audit of POS over 2 acres ($n = 516$) within a 408-km² area of metropolitan Perth, Western Australia; and personal interviews with 1803 adults (aged 18 to 59 years) (52.9% response rate). The association between access to POS and physical activity was examined using three accessibility models that progressively adjusted for distance to POS, and its attractiveness and size. In 2002, an observational study examined the influence of attractiveness on the use of POS by observing users of three pairs of high- and low-

attractiveness on the use of POS by observing users of three pairs of high- and low-quality (based on attractiveness) POS matched for size and location.

Results

Overall, 28.8% of respondents reported using POS for physical activity. The likelihood of using POS increased with increasing levels of access, but the effect was greater in the model that adjusted for distance, attractiveness, and size. After adjustment, those with very good access to large, attractive POS were 50% more likely to achieve high levels of walking (odds ratio, 1.50; 95% confidence level, 1.06–2.13). The observational study showed that after matching POS for size and location, 70% of POS users observed visited attractive POS.

Conclusions

Access to attractive, large POS is associated with higher levels of walking. To increase walking, thoughtful design (and redesign) of POS is required that creates large, attractive POS with facilities that encourage active use by multiple users (e.g., walkers, sports participants, picnickers).



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