

Newsletter For Mature Adults



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Walking Boosts Brain Health

There's yet another reason to pick that walkable community you've been thinking about for your next home.

Walking is good for brain health and could contribute to keeping seniors more cognitively fit.

That's according to new research (<https://bit.ly/3xP64zt>) by the **BRAIN Lab at Colorado State University**. It shows that aerobic exercise, particularly walking, positively affects – refreshes – the brain's white matter. "White matter deterioration is associated with cognitive impairment in healthy aging and Alzheimer's disease," says the study.

So even if you've been inactive during the pandemic, putting on your walking shoes could improve your well-being.

And living somewhere that allows for regular strolls and running errands on foot makes daily walks all the easier.

Walkable communities also improve satisfaction, according to a pair of studies, the "Community and Transportation Preference Surveys" (<https://bit.ly/3CSkVgc>), conducted by the National Association of REALTORS® earlier this year.

Respondents who strongly agree that there are "lots of places to walk nearby" show an 8% increase in quality of life, for example. And older generations – Gen X and beyond – and those with higher incomes showed an increased interest in walkability.

So, when you're scoping out new neighborhoods, watch for the elements that make them walkable. According to Walkscore, they are:

- **A center:** Walkable neighborhoods have a center, whether it's a main street or a public space.
- **People:** Enough people for businesses to flourish and for public transit to run frequently.
- **Mixed-income, mixed-use:** Affordable housing located near businesses.
- **Parks and public space:** Plenty of public places to gather and play.
- **Pedestrian design:** Buildings are close to the street and parking lots are relegated to the back.
- **Schools and workplaces:** Close enough that most residents can walk from their homes.

- **Complete streets:** Streets designed for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit.

Walkscore ranked the United States' most walkable cities (<https://bit.ly/3yQUncD>) in 2020, and the top five are:

1. New York City (88 out of 100)
2. San Francisco (87.4)
3. Boston (82.0)
4. Philadelphia (78.8)
5. Miami (77.6)

You also can find walkability scores for neighborhoods within major cities, other U.S. cities, and individual addresses at WalkScore (<https://bit.ly/37GWfcd>).

Additional resources:

Here are some ways to learn more about walkable communities, how to incorporate walking into your day-to-day life, and where to find walking groups.

- Build a Better Burb (<https://bit.ly/3yPrhui>)
- How much physical activity do older adults need? (<https://bit.ly/3yO9B24>)
- How to find a walking club (<https://bit.ly/3iL5M8o>)
- Start or Join a Walking Club (<https://bit.ly/2Uk3yDr>)
- Walk Your Way to a Better Life (<https://bit.ly/3iTKLsI>)

How well does your community support aging?

Beyond looking at just a community's physical attributes – walkability, for example – another consideration when you're shopping for a new community is how well a prospective city or town supports aging at home.

One takeaway from a recent survey, "Long-Term Care in America: How well can communities support aging at home?" is that a happy, successful aging experience entails a combination of things that address a person's mind, body, and soul. The July 2021 study (<https://bit.ly/3iOF1jn>) was conducted by the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Sure, there's a need for doctors, hospitals, and urgent care. Still, it's also essential to have places of worship, good grocery stores, the ability to participate in civic engagement, and make the human connections contribute to a full life.

Some questions worth asking:

- What's the social scene like?
- Are there opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to discuss civic issues and interact with agencies that make community decisions?

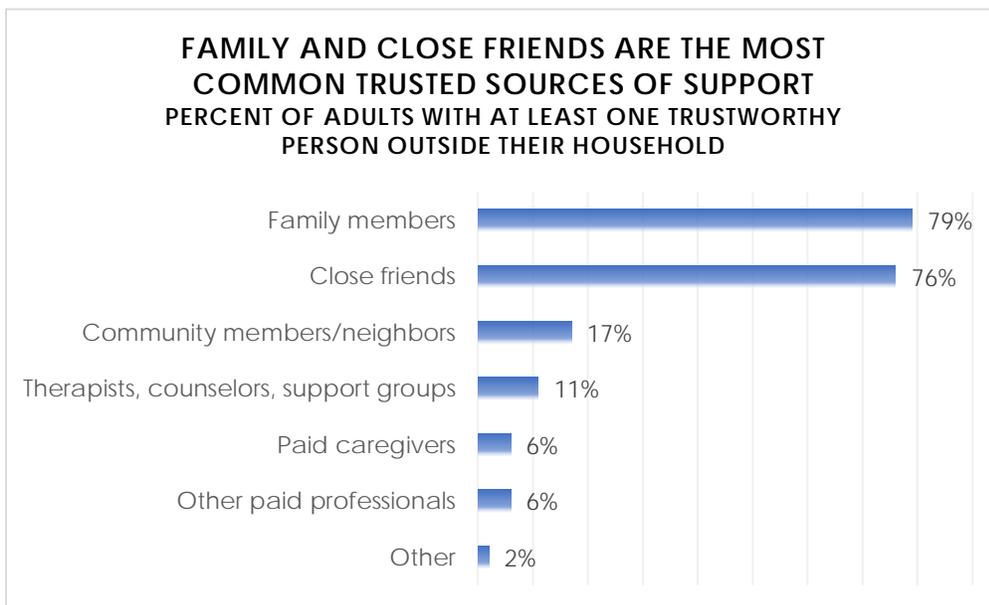
- What community events, affordable activities, outdoor recreation areas, and places for pursuing hobbies are available?
- What are the continuing education opportunities?
- What are transit choices?
- Are there organizations that help older adults find services?
- Is there a hotline for mental health support?
- What employment opportunities exist?

According to the NORC study, 46% of respondents think their local area does a good job meeting older adults' health care needs. That said, white adults (52%) are more likely to think so than non-white adults (37%).

In addition, there also are income disparities. For example, adult households making \$100,000 or more are more likely to think their area does a good job providing healthy food and nutrition than those making less than \$50,000.

More than half (52%) of white adults think their area does a suitable job meeting needs for health care compared to 37% of those who are non-white. Those living in urban areas are more likely than those in rural areas to say that their area does a good job meeting older adults' needs for transportation.

Most adults say they'd prefer to receive help with living at home from a loved one. However, support from a trusted personal network is critical to aging at home, and most respondents say they have people outside their household who can help with illness, emotional support, or minor emergencies.



But those with lower incomes are less likely to have a large group of trusted people to rely on, found NORC. For example, urban dwellers are less likely to count on neighbors (11%) for help than those living in suburban (19%) or rural (20%) places.

For most adults, their trusted person lives close by, with 81% reporting that that person is less than an hour away. Nineteen percent say their trusted person lives more than an hour away.

The key question to answer is who are the go-to people you can count on when facing an illness or need emotional support? And how long would it take them to reach you in an emergency?

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