



Are convenience stores making women fat?



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Submitted by [Kathleen Blanchard RN](#) on 2010-07-04

Researchers suspect convenience stores may be making women fat. University of Buffalo researchers suspect it may be so, in a study showing that women who live closer to supermarkets have lower [mass index \(BMI\)](#), compared to those with a higher number of convenience stores and restaurants. Women near convenience stores were found to be more obese.

According to Samina Raja, PhD, UB professor of urban and regional planning who led the study titled "Food Environment, Built Environment and Women's BMI: Evidence from Erie County, New York", "the interaction of the food environment and the built environment in a neighborhood carries significant consequences for obesity. For example, a diverse land-use mix, while beneficial for promoting [physical activity](#), is tied to a net increase in BMI when that land is dominated by [restaurants](#)".

Raja says neighborhood planning should take women's health into account and is an important factor for curbing [obesity rates](#), pointing out that obesity rates among women are higher than men. "The prevalence of obesity is a significant [public health](#)

concern because it places individuals at a risk for a variety of diseases," she says, "and the role of environmental factors in contributing to obesity has received a lot of attention. We have attempted here to explain the paradox of high BMI rates among women living in highly walkable inner city neighborhoods.

Past studies have shown that convenience store proximity to home may also be promoting childhood obesity. The researchers say a limitation of the study includes lack of knowledge about where the women actually did their shopping, what type of restaurants were in the neighborhood ([fast food](#) versus other), and the quality of foods available in the neighborhood.

Nevertheless, the authors advocate improving food environments in neighborhoods, something that might improve women's health. "Comprehensive plans, regulatory mechanisms and financial incentives can be used individually or in concert to improve food environments", write the authors. They cite Pennsylvania's Fresh [Food](#) Financing Initiative, a program to bring [fresh foods](#) to underserved neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

According to the [Food Trust](#), "Research has shown that the presence of grocery stores selling fresh [fruits and vegetables](#) in a community helps people [maintain a healthy weight](#)." The new study from UAB researchers also suggests convenience stores may be making women fat due to lack of access to fresh [fruits](#), vegetables, and quality restaurants within walking distance of home.

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