

Educational support materials for ABIM's *Care for the Underserved* Module

Module #25

A recent review of the research on neighborhood environment and access to healthy foods in the US summarizes that healthier diets are more common among populations with better access to supermarkets and less access to convenience stores. People living in the neighborhoods with better access to supermarkets also struggle less with obesity and hypertension.(1) Evidence also shows that a paucity of fast-food restaurants may have a positive effect on diet and obesity.(1) While low-income, minority, and rural neighborhoods consistently have fewer high quality supermarket with inexpensive produce and/or other healthy food options and a greater density of fast-food restaurants.(1-6)

Residents of low income and minority communities are less likely to report that it is pleasant or easy to walk in their neighborhoods and tend to reside in areas with fewer physical activity facilities, both of which may hinder physical activity.(7,8) Urban environments that are believed to be conducive to walking for transportation, i.e., those characterized by higher residential density, higher street connectivity, and greater land use mix, have been associated with higher rates of physical activity and lower body mass index. (8) Some evidence suggests that “walkable” environments are generally more common in low income and minority communities, but that environments conducive to walking may play a bigger role in obesity and physical activity patterns for higher income and white neighborhoods.

The social environment (social cohesion, exposure to violence or crime rates, and perceived safety) of a community has also been linked to obesity, but is most consistently related to poor mental health status (depression and stress). (9) While poor housing conditions and poor air quality have been related to racial disparities in asthma outcomes.(10)

For further information, see the following:

1. Larson NI, Story MT, Nelson MC: Neighborhood environments: Disparities in access to healthy foods in the U.S. *Am J Prev Med* 2009;36(1):74-81.
2. Franco M, Diez Roux AV, Glass TA, et al: Neighborhood characteristics and availability of healthy foods in Baltimore. *Am J Prev Med* 2008;35(6):561-567.
3. Baker EA, Schootman M, Barnidge E, Kelly C: The role of race and poverty in access to foods that enable individuals to adhere to dietary guidelines. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2006;3(3):A76.

This educational support material was created by the Society of General Internal Medicine's Disparities Task Force. For more information, visit www.sгим.org/qo/disparities

Educational support materials for ABIM's *Care for the Underserved* Module

4. Beaulac J, Kristjansson E, Cummins S: A systematic review of food deserts, 1966-2007. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2009;6(3):A105.
5. Horowitz CR, Colson KA, Hebert PL, Lancaster K. Barriers to buying healthy foods for people with diabetes: evidence of environmental disparities. *Am J Public Health*. 2004 Sep;94(9):1549-54.
6. Sloane DC, Diamant AL, Lewis LB, Yancey AK, Flynn G, Nascimento LM, McCarthy WJ, Guinyard JJ, Cousineau MR; REACH Coalition of the African American Building a Legacy of Health Project. Improving the nutritional resource environment for healthy living through community-based participatory research. *J Gen Intern Med*. 2003 Jul;18(7):568-75.
7. Mujahid MS, Diez Roux AV, Shen M, et al: Relation between neighborhood environments and obesity in the Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis. *Am J Epidemiol* 2008;167(11):1349-1357.
8. Lovasi GS, Hutson MA, Guerra M, Neckerman KM: Built environments and obesity in disadvantaged populations. *Epidemiol Rev* 2009;31:7-20.
9. Fish JS, Ettner S, Ang A, Brown AF. Association of perceived neighborhood safety and body mass index. *Am J Public Health*. 2010 Nov;100(11):2296-303.
10. Yinusa-Nyahkoon LS. Cohn ES. Cortes DE. Bokhour BG. Ecological barriers and social forces in childhood asthma management: examining routines of African American families living in the inner city. *J Asthma*. 2010;47(7):701-10