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[Search](#)
[Home](#) / [Archives](#) / [Vol. 19 Supp. \(2017\)](#) / [Poster presentations](#)

Motivational and environmental contributors to incidental physical activity

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Abstract

Background: Insufficient physical activity, and a more sedentary lifestyle, has resulted in an energy imbalance, contributing to the current obesity epidemic. Incidental physical activity is a major factor of energy expenditure and even a slight increase in daily activity can benefit health. This study investigated motivational and environmental factors as potential stimulators and/or inhibitors of incidental physical activity. Method: In a correlational design, 132 community-dwelling participants (17-61 years) completed an online questionnaire measuring incidental physical activity (International Physical Activity Questionnaire), autonomous/controlled motivation for incidental physical activities (Perceived Locus of Causality Questionnaire) and environmental characteristics (Neighbourhood Environment Walkability Scale). Findings: Hierarchical regression analysis showed that autonomous motivation and neighbourhood walkability each individually contributed to incidental physical activity, such that individuals with higher levels of autonomous motivation, and

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those who live in highly walkable neighbourhoods, engage in higher levels of daily activity. Motivation and neighbourhood walkability did not interact to predict incidental physical activity. Discussion: Findings support Self-Determination Theory, which posits autonomous motivation as an important contributor to activity engagement. They also support Socio-Economic theories which propose that particular characteristics of the environment, such as neighbourhood walkability can positively influence physical activity behaviour. At a practical level, the current findings offer potential scope for the development of interventions which target both environmental and motivational factors, such as nudging techniques, in order to increase daily activity levels

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