

The relationship of the local food environment with Obesity: a systematic review of Methods, Study Quality, and Results

While the prevalence of obesity in the United States (US) is extremely high, it differs not only across the country but also across neighbourhoods. This therefore suggests that there is a link between neighbourhood factors and obesity. The aim of this review was to investigate if there is a link between the local food environment and obesity, in the US and Canada. The local food environment is considered to be the availability of food to purchase close to the home. The review also assesses the quality of studies in the field.

With 71 studies identified for review, the study quality was low. Findings revealed that overall, the link between the local food environment and obesity was low. Although there was not strong evidence, some noticeable patterns emerged:

- Availability of supermarkets was linked to decreased obesity levels for adults
- Availability of fast food stores was linked to increased obesity levels for adults
- Availability of fast food stores was linked to increased obesity levels for low-income children
- The overall measure of the healthfulness of the local food environment found that a less healthy environment was linked to increased obesity levels for adults

A key finding is that the evidence linking the food environment and obesity has not strengthened. This is despite much research in this area in the last fifteen years (since 2015). The authors call for new research ideas that strengthen the quality of evidence in this field. There is some indication of the link between local food environments and obesity. However, this is too weak to inform policy at this stage.

Reference: Cobb LK, Appel LJ, Franco M, Jones-Smith JC, Nur A, Anderson CAM. The relationship of the local food environment with obesity: A systematic review of methods, study quality, and results. *Obesity*. 2015;23(7):1331-1344. [doi:10.1002/oby.21118](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.21118)