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The environment includes everything around us: the air we breathe, the land we stand on, the water we swim in. Everyone wants to live in a healthy environment, but have you ever considered your environment contributing to your health? Our environment includes where we live, and how that area is used.

With the growth of the suburban lifestyle after World War II, the population has moved farther and farther from urban centers, into the ever-sprawling subdivisions of the suburbs. Americans are ever more car-dependant, all leading to a decrease in the amount of walking done by an average person.

The Centers for Disease Control have identified obesity as an epidemic in the United States. “According to results of the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), an estimated 64% of U.S. adults aged 20 years and older are classified as overweight or obese. Among U.S. adults, obesity has doubled since 1980.” Additionally, the CDC has linked transportation-related air pollutants to the onset of certain respiratory conditions. These findings have led the CDC to support the development of “Healthy Places.”

According to the CDC, a “healthy place” takes into account all aspects of human health in relation to the environment created by that place. In association with the American Planning Association, the CDC developed six qualities that describe the design of a healthy community:

- Has a unique sense of community and place
- Preserves and enhances valuable natural and cultural resources
- Equitably distributes the costs and benefits of development

- Expands the range of transportation, employment, and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner
- Values long-range, region-wide sustainability rather than short-term, incremental, or geographically isolated actions
- Promotes public health and healthy communities.

For more information on how your environment affects your health, or more about the Healthy Places initiative, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces>.