

[IMAGE]

Commuting Your Health Away

By Editorial Staff

Unless you're a work-at-home member of the labor force (which has its own health risks, by the way), most of us commute from home to work and back again at least five days a week. From a health perspective, research suggests commuting is bad news, and it goes beyond the stress associated with those bumper-to-bumper, road-rage meltdowns you find yourself experiencing ... but somehow think you can handle day after day, week after week, year after year.

According to several recent studies, commuting – particularly longer times spent commuting – has a negative impact on weight, blood pressure, sleep quality / amount and heart disease. One study suggested the longer the commute, the higher the commuter's body-mass index, waist circumference, diastolic and systolic blood pressure, and metabolic risk factors. Another study found that high blood pressure, stress and heart disease were more likely in people who commuted more than 30 miles a day. And in a third study, researchers concluded: "Commuting long distances negatively impacts one's ability to capture adequate sleep."

The Telecommuting Age isn't necessarily solving the commuting health crisis, either; after all, even as more people work from home, the population at large continues to do more driving and less transportation by other means (bikes, foot, etc.). More time in cars, less time exercising - another recipe for health disaster.

commute - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark The solution, if there is one, is to find ways to make your commutes as short, stress-free and infrequent as possible. Here are a few suggestions:

- *Map it out:* If there are multiple routes to your job, try some trial and error to determine which one gets you to and from work in the shortest – and least painful – amount of time.
- *Try 40 in 4:* If your employer / state allows, ask about a possible four-day, 10-hour-a-day workweek option. You'll find that the 10 hours aren't a major drain, and you'll appreciate the extra day away from work – and out of the traffic jams.
- *Carpool:* Yes, you're still spending time in a car, but at least you aren't always the one driving (and dealing with other drivers); and you're also not alone with your traffic frustrations, all of which

contribute to stress.

- *Schedule it & stick to it:* A likely explanation for why longer commutes lead to higher weight, etc., is not only that commuters sit in a car too long, but also that by the time they get home, they have little time – or perhaps interest – in exercising. Schedule in exercise before or after work and stick to the routine. It will help counter some of the effects of your commute, including stress.

For many people, commuting is a reality, and depending on the job opportunity and living situation, they can't change the distance to and from work. But that doesn't mean you're destined to a life in the slow lane and its debilitating health effects. Talk to your doctor for more information.

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