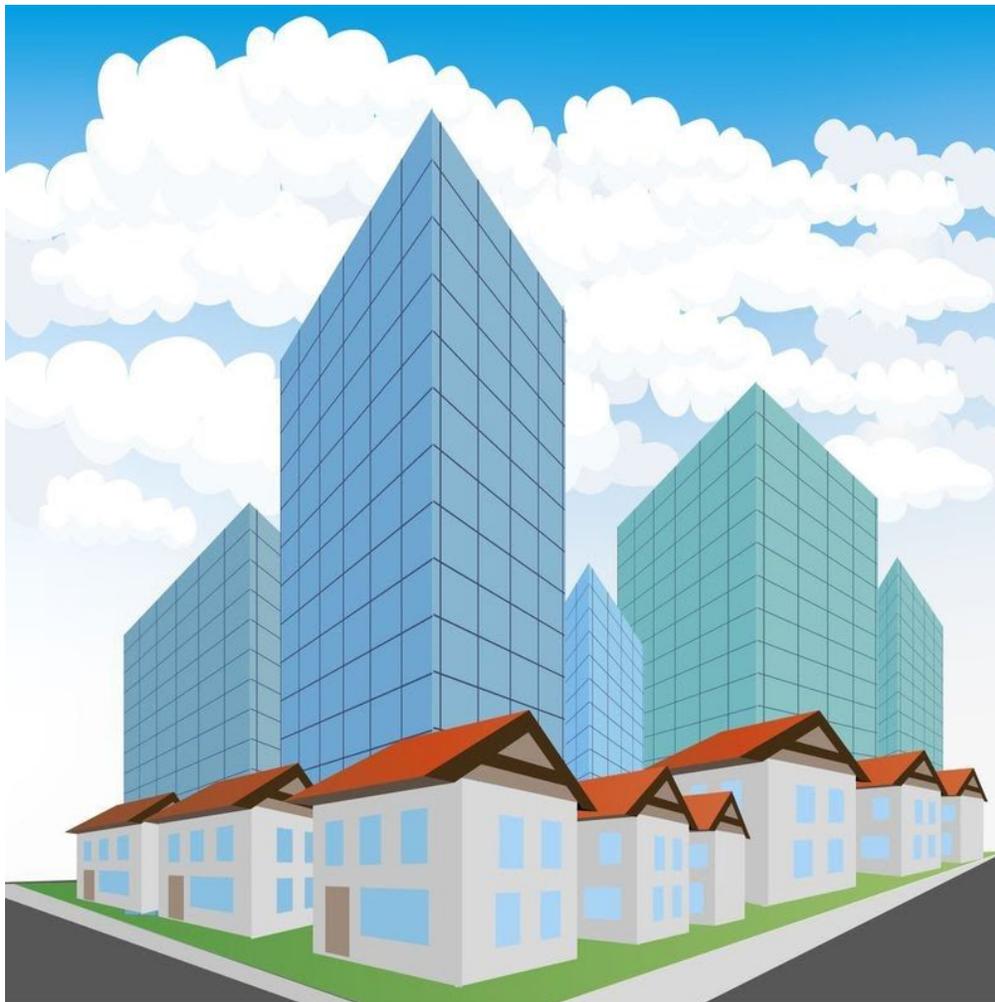


City vs. the 'burbs: Which one is healthier for your kids?

By LAURA CIPULLO

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While many parents think raising kids in the suburbs is a must, one mom thinks city living is ideal for promoting a healthy lifestyle.

About one year ago, I moved to the 'burbs with many reservations. I wondered if the suburbs were truly better for my boys' health.

Yes, we would be close to family, and yes, we would be enveloped in trees and nature, but would my boys be as active?

I know I am personally less physically active living here in the suburbs and I must make that many more attempts to be personally physical here.

But what about the kids? Here is what I learned over the past year.

This may come as a shock to you, but in our personal situation, moving from north Battery Park City, N.Y., to Bergen County, N.J., my boys' activity levels decreased. They were more physically active and, I think, healthier overall living in New York City. This is our truth and perhaps not that of others.

When I lived in New York with my husband and children, we walked or scooted everywhere. It wasn't an activity; rather it was our form of transportation or commuting.

Yes, we took cabs and the subway, but no matter what, we moved everyday in someway. We typically rode our scooters two and a half miles between school and home in the afternoons, played on the parks' jungle gyms, and, when my boys were old enough, joined the drop-in soccer and football games on the lawns of Battery Park.

Either before or after sports, piano lessons, or appointments, we left the apartment to get fresh air and move. Sometimes we never even went back to the apartment until it was dinnertime.

Play dates joined other play dates. If you didn't have a play date, no problem. We just went to the field or the parks to find others playing. It could be a tourist visiting or a group a kids we didn't know. Everyone just played with everyone.

My boys were sweaty, running, and in the moment. Parents even joined in the games! It was a dream!

In the 'burbs, parents arrange play dates and afterschool activities. After school, everyone goes their way, perhaps with one another's children. The kids can play together outside or inside, but there is no parent organizing a drop-in soccer game.

The lure of the video game and/or the iPad is only a few steps away. In the city, once you were outside, there was no turning back. There was no option to just going home. It was flights up. It was more black and white. You were in or out.

The kids walked to the grocery store and helped carry packages. We walked to our doctors' appointments and to the subway. Then the kids would play on their sports team or in a drop-in game, all before coming home to homework and TV.

I do admit I am at fault here in the 'burbs. Part of the issue is that I commute half of the week to New York City. Therefore, I drop the boys off at school and pick them up in the car. We scooted from school to home maybe a handful of times.

The other issue with scooting in the 'burbs is that the sidewalks are uneven and actually make scooting dangerous. Instead, I have had the boys ride their bikes while I go for a run, but they hate every minute of it as it feels like exercise rather than fun for them.

As an RD (Registered Dietitian) and a mom, I know I need to be creative and set more boundaries with the electronics.

But I get tired. I am the one who has to play kickball, boxball, and basketball in the driveway. Even with this, the kids barely move compared to the length of the football and soccer fields in Battery Park or near Chelsea Piers.

At present, the kids participate in organized sports after school three days a week and one day on the weekend. The football program is what I consider to be exercise, while the other programs are consistent with physical activity but not effective for increasing endurance.

Don't get me wrong, I love my home, I love having my children see their grandparents often, and I love waking up to deer grazing in my yard.

While I think there are many other towns that offer easier access to healthier lifestyles, such as Fort Collins, Col., and Hilton Head Island, S.C., this is not my reality.

As a mom it is up to me to continue to commit myself to making a healthier environment for my children and all other children. This is my reality and not necessarily the reality of other suburban mothers.

However, for all who think raising kids in the 'burbs is a must for their kids, please know that I think city living was more ideal for promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Laura Cipullo is a registered dietitian and author of the Book, "The Women's Health Body Clock Diet."

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