

How Long Car Commutes Impact Mental Health

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With all the studies that have been conducted on the not-so-awesome effects of driving to and from work, especially when your commute entails sitting in traffic for a good hour or so, it's pretty clear: Driving to and from work can take a toll on your physical health.

However, *Women's Health Magazine's* Carolyn Kylstra¹ points out in her article, "10 Things Your Commute Does to Your Body," that driving to work also impacts your mental health. And, not in a good way.

The Problem

In 2014, the University of East Anglia and the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR)², conducted a study by observing 18 years of data collected on approximately 18,000 commuters in the UK between the ages of 18-65. Their findings showed that car commuters:

- Feel unsatisfied with life
- Develop feelings of worthlessness
- Are unhappy
- Suffer from higher levels of anxiety
- Lack sleep
- Have trouble facing problems

And, it doesn't take being stuck behind the wheel for that long for these negative effects to occur. In fact, researchers from the University School of Medicine in Saint Louis and the Cooper Institute in Dallas reported in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*³ "that people with commutes of at least 10 miles each way have a higher tendency toward depression, anxiety, and social isolation."

The Solution: Take Public Transportation

At the end of the day, moving truly matters. According to *Healthline News*⁴ "Sitting in a car is probably the least healthy way to commute to work." And, while walking or biking to work is definitely the healthiest option, it turns out that taking public transportation to and from work is a healthier commuting alternative to driving as well.

Why?

1. Taking public transportation is more active than driving.

Taking public transportation is an active form of commuting because it requires you to move. According to *Healthline News*⁴, “Active transportation is any kind of commuting that involves physical activity. For some people, that means biking or walking to work. For others, it means biking or walking part of the way, then taking some other form of transportation such as a bus, a train, or a shared ride.” Since, transit riders typically have to walk or bike to the train station or bus stop, it allows them to be more physically active than car commuters. And, we all know that getting a little cardio in is never a bad thing.

2. It's less stressful to take public transportation than it is to drive.

Being stuck in traffic is no fun. A study conducted in Canada in 2011 published in *World Leisure Journal*⁵ explains that “Traffic congestion and lengthy commutes were associated with higher stress levels among full-time workers.” And, stress is linked to all kinds of physical health problems, including cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, stomach issues, and headaches, just to name a few.

When you're on the train, you don't have to worry about rush hour traffic or rude drivers cutting you off. They don't call it “road rage” for nothing.

3. Transit commuters have time to unwind.

According to The University of East Anglia and the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR)'s² lead researcher Adam Martin: “Commuters reported feeling better when travelling by public transport, compared to driving. You might think that things like disruption to services or crowds of commuters might have been a cause of considerable stress. But, as buses or trains also give people time to relax, read, socialize, and there is usually an associated walk to the bus stop or railway station, it appears to cheer people up.”

In Sum

Driving to work wreaks havoc on one's physical and mental health. But, walking or biking to work isn't the only healthy commuting option game in town. It turns out that taking public transportation is a great option and a much healthier alternative than driving. So, if you are able to take public transportation to the office, go for it!

References

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