

The Best And Worst Cities For Women

By the Editors of Women's Health

Women's Health

Hometown bragging rights don't come cheap. There are teetering skyscrapers to erect, all-star athletes to woo, world-class museums to fill. But the residents (and the tourist boards) of the 10 cities topping our list are about to get something to crow about, gratis.

To compile our first annual survey of America's Best & Worst Cities for Women, we joined forces with Men's Health to analyze how 100 U.S. metropolises stack up when it comes to health, fitness, and quality of life. (Check out this month's issue of [Men's Health](#) to find out whether your city is guy-friendly, too.) Our number-crunching team tallied 38 factors, including cancer rates, commute times, air quality, and the number of residents who swipe their gym passes regularly. When the dust finally cleared, a few of the cities had trounced the competition.

Need some extra workout motivation? You'll find plenty of potential exercise buddies in our No. 10 city, Aurora, Colorado, one of the fittest on the list. Hoping to celebrate your centennial? Bundle up. Women have the highest life expectancies in Fargo, N.D. (No. 7 overall). Want to clear the air? Learn the way to San Jose (No. 4), where a public smoking ban contributes to the population's lower-than-average cigarette habit.

And even if your hometown is in the bottom 10, better known for being drenched in smog than in sunshine, read on for tips from cities that scored the highest.

The 10 best

1. Salt Lake City
2. San Francisco
3. Seattle
4. San Jose, Calif.
5. Denver
6. Minneapolis
7. Fargo, N.D.
8. Madison, Wis.
9. Manchester, N.H.
10. Aurora, Colo.

Tips from 5 of the top 10 cities

Salt Lake City: Squash on-the-job stress

SLC isn't known as a boozy town; but who needs to drown your sorrows at happy hour when you actually like your job? Thanks to mega job growth, workers here climb the career ladder faster; they also spend less time than the average commuter stuck in traffic. "That translates into a lot less stress," says Michael Farber, M.D., director of the Executive Health Program at Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey. "When you keep stress in check, your immune system works better and you're more likely to adopt and stick to healthy habits." No surprise, then, that a study from Australia found that people with the most job strain and instability had poorer health than those with job security. Can't stand your current gig? Learning new skills at your workplace can boost your résumé and help you feel more in control.

San Francisco: Pile on produce

In crunchy San Francisco, you can't walk two blocks without running into an organic fruit market, and our research shows that residents take full advantage: The city ranked seventh for fruit-and-veggie intake. Not coincidentally, San Franciscans boast one of the lowest diabetes death rates in the country. A recent study from the UK found that people who fill up on produce are 22 percent less likely to develop type 2 diabetes. If you're sick of salads, grab a Larabar

fruit and nut bar or a low-sodium V8; each contains at least a full serving of fruits or vegetables.

San Jose, CA: Run away from breast cancer

Residents of this bustling Silicon Valley city may have packed schedules, but they still manage to fit in more aerobic exercise and strength training than most Americans. And those dedicated workouts could have a lot to do with San Jose's low breast-cancer death rate. "Study after study has shown that exercise dramatically slashes the risk of breast cancer," says Cynthia Drogula, M.D., director of the Aiello Breast Center at Baltimore Washington Medical Center. "It's not about putting in long hours at the gym; it's about consistency. Even 30 to 40 minutes three times a week may decrease your odds by up to 30 percent."

Madison, Wis.: Give your ticker some TLC

Why are women in Madison among the least likely to die of heart disease and stroke? Maybe it's because this hippie haven offers 15,000 acres of shimmering lakes, nearly 300 city parks, and a seriously laid-back lifestyle. "High levels of both stress and anger have been linked to an increased risk of heart disease," says Annabelle Volgman, M.D., medical director of the Rush Heart Center for Women at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. Or maybe it's eating all that cheese: New research suggests that people who load up (that's two or more servings a day) on low-fat dairy products decrease their risk of high blood pressure and heart disease.

Manchester, N.H.: Go where the guys are

Looking for a mate? Hightail it to Manchester, where there are 71 single women for every 100 single men; the most female-friendly ratio of any city on our list, including the hyped man-tasia of Anchorage, Alaska. More good news: Coupling up has benefits beyond the bedroom. "Women who are married tend to be in better health than those who aren't," Farber says. "Partners can motivate each other to keep up healthy habits." Still single? Make a date with your best bud instead. Research shows that people who have a trusted confidante are happier and have stronger immune systems than loner types.

The 10 worst

91. St. Petersburg, Fla.
92. Birmingham, Ala.
93. Modesto, Calif.
94. Cleveland
95. Detroit
96. Charleston, W.Va.
97. Toledo, Ohio
98. Memphis, Tenn.
99. St. Louis
100. Bakersfield, Calif.

[>> Next: The Best and Worst Cities for Men](#)

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