

Healthiest Cities in America

by **BestPlaces.net**

MSN Health & Fitness Exclusive

The healthiest city dwellers in America live in San Jose, Calif., according to a new study released by Bert Sperling's BestPlaces and multivitamin-maker Centrum. The Centrum Healthiest Cities Study is the first-ever comprehensive "health report card" of the 50 largest metro areas in the U.S. that's based on key factors including health status, nutrition and exercise, plus mental health and life balance, which contribute to overall well-being.

According to the report card, in the nationwide battle for healthiest cities, the West easily trumps the East. California boasts five cities in the top 10: San Jose, San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento and the Orange County area. Read more about these top cities and others that made the list.

1) San Jose, Calif.

San Jose tops our ranking of America's healthiest cities, thanks to outstanding scores in the major categories of health status, lifestyle choices and diet. In the separate categories, residents of San Jose reported the study's best scores in mental wellness, rate of cigarette smoking and consumption of fruits and vegetables. In one of the few negative areas, residents here did report one of the study's highest rates of [asthma](#).

2) Washington, D.C.

One of the big surprises was the second-place ranking of Washington, D.C. It scored well in all five major categories, including the top score in mental wellness. Washingtonians reported feeling well physically, mentally and emotionally and had high scores in dental care and [BMI \(or body mass index\)](#). However, Washington did record higher than average incidences of diabetes and hypertension.

3) San Francisco

Like its neighbor San Jose to the south, San Francisco showed strong scores in all major categories except mental wellness. Its residents had the study's highest scores in BMI and dental care, plus a strong showing in the physical activity category. San Franciscans reported problems with sleeping and stress, and had the study's highest rate of [diabetes](#). San Francisco also had the study's highest number of physicians per capita.

4) Seattle-Bellevue-Everett

The Seattle metro area had the study's best scores in the areas of physical activity and lifestyle pursuits. Respondents here reported the highest level of vigorous exercise. Seattlites had high rates of diabetes, hypertension and, yes, sleeplessness. (Insert your own *Sleepless in Seattle* joke here.)

5) Salt Lake City-Ogden

Salt Lake City had its highest scores in the mental wellness and physical activity categories, and all the major categories were above average. Despite getting a lot of exercise, its residents had high rates of diabetes, hypertension and asthma, and recorded the study's highest rate of high [cholesterol](#).

6) Oakland, Calif.

Oakland is the third Bay Area city in the top 10 healthiest cities. Like the others, it earned above-average scores in all five major categories. Oakland was particularly strong in health status, with low smoking and good [dental care](#). However, it did record high rates of diabetes and high cholesterol.

7) Sacramento, Calif.

Sacramento was above average in four of the five major categories, stumbling only in mental wellness. Residents there recorded the study's lowest asthma rate and also had one of the top scores for exercise.

8) Orange County, Calif.

"The O.C." was particularly strong in the categories of mental wellness, lifestyle pursuits and physical activity. Its health status scores were weak, with high rates of [arthritis](#) and hypertension. It also had the study's highest rate of occasional smoking. On the positive side, it had the best score for getting restful sleep.

9) Denver

Denver was strong in all major categories, with the exception of the health status category. Denver residents reported one of the best BMI scores. Not surprisingly, they also reported a high level of physical activity. However, they also reported a high rate of diabetes and [hypertension](#).

10) Austin-San Marcos, Texas

Austin earned one of the highest scores in the category of [physical activity](#), but one of the lowest in health status. Residents had one of the highest scores for vigorous activity and in the number of gyms and health clubs per capita. But they also reported some of the highest rates of diabetes, hypertension and arthritis.

To create the study, Bert Sperling of Sperling's BestPlaces culled data on 50 U.S. cities from both public and private sources and tested each city against 50 select measures in five major categories: physical activity, health status, nutrition, lifestyle pursuits, and mental wellness. [Read about how the study was conducted.](#)

Rankings of the 50 Largest U.S. Cities

Rank	City	State	Points	Mental	Lifestyle	Activity	Health	Diet
1	San Jose	CA	1,272	55	93	87	100	93
2	Washington	DC-MD-VA-WV	1,207	100	89	85	83	95
3	San Francisco	CA	1,141	40	97	97	91	85
4	Seattle-Bellevue-Everett	WA	1,121	48	100	100	71	73
5	Salt Lake City-Ogden	UT	1,063	83	75	89	63	77
6	Oakland	CA	1,065	59	79	77	93	71
7	Sacramento	CA	1,059	32	77	81	85	91
8	Orange County	CA	1,025	95	95	75	18	57
9	Denver	CO	1,017	71	73	93	20	83
10	Austin-San Marcos	TX	999	73	69	95	2	79
11	Boston	MA-NH-ME	992	65	46	83	67	55
12	San Diego	CA	978	69	71	67	51	67
13	Minneapolis-St. Paul	MN-WI	976	93	91	91	6	40
14	Bergen-Passaic	NJ	973	91	6	61	89	51
15	Nassau-Suffolk	NY	968	79	24	73	69	48
16	Portland-Vancouver	OR-WA	958	18	83	79	44	59
17	Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill	NC	954	97	44	24	24	89

18	Nashville	TN	940	85	42	12	40	97
19	Baltimore	MD	933	24	26	71	48	65
20	Riverside-San Bernardino	CA	927	6	40	57	97	42
21	Phoenix-Mesa	AZ	924	38	48	63	55	61
22	Pittsburgh	PA	918	89	2	69	73	26
23	Los Angeles-Long Beach	CA	910	8	85	34	81	75
24	Philadelphia	PA-NJ	888	61	30	65	77	32
25	Newark	NJ	883	63	4	48	87	44
26	Atlanta	GA	872	67	63	59	1	69
27	Milwaukee-Waukesha	WI	834	42	67	53	42	28
28	Fort Lauderdale	FL	829	34	36	4	57	87
29	Chicago	IL	827	81	87	20	4	53
30	Kansas City	MO-KS	824	77	51	30	46	30
31	Greensboro-Winston-Salem-High Point	NC	813	46	8	6	59	81
32	Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill	NC-SC	813	53	12	14	30	63
33	Miami	FL	810	20	16	2	26	100
34	St. Louis	MO-IL	807	57	81	40	32	18
35	Dallas	TX	798	75	28	44	12	34
36	Houston	TX	796	36	20	36	34	38
37	Fort Worth-Arlington	TX	788	40	32	38	61	22
38	Providence-Fall River-Warwick	RI-MA	781	14	18	46	75	14
39	Norfolk-Virginia Beach-Newport News	VA-NC	778	87	38	42	28	4
40	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater	FL	776	10	10	22	79	36
41	Indianapolis	IN	774	28	53	51	36	10
42	Las Vegas	NV-AZ	754	44	55	28	16	16
43	New York	NY	725	12	59	8	38	46
44	Detroit	MI	719	1	22	26	95	2
45	Columbus	OH	702	51	57	55	8	1
46	Orlando	FL	700	4	65	16	10	20

47	Cleveland-Lorain-Elyria	OH	683	16	34	18	65	6
48	Cincinnati	OH-KY-IN	681	2	61	32	22	8
49	San Antonio	TX	674	22	14	10	53	12
50	New Orleans	LA	582	26	1	1	14	24

"These snapshots of healthiness of U.S. metro areas help us better understand each city's distinct character and dimension," said Bert Sperling. "From their relative strengths and weaknesses in the five categories, one common theme emerges: nearly all city dwellers could do a better job tending to the physical, mental, social and nutritional aspects of their lives and working toward a more balanced lifestyle."

About the Centrum Healthiest Cities in America Study

Methodology

This study was conducted by Bert Sperling. The 50 most populous metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs), as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, were chosen to be included in the study. For the purpose of this study, MSAs are referred to as "cities" or "metro areas." The 2003 estimated population was used to determine the most populous 50 places. The study was based on the following criteria:

Mental Wellness	Lifestyle	Fitness	Health Status	Nutrition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress index Sleep problems Mental health not good Poor health-reduced usual activities Physical health not good General health is excellent Low unemployment rate High recent job growth Cost of living index 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commute time Vacation days Hours per week Overtime hours Social and recr. memberships Bicycling expenditures Camping and boating expend. Toys, hobbies expend. Dinner out expend. Theater, symph, dance, opera Musical instr. stores Amusement parks Dog parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise - moderate Exercise - vigorous Some physical activity Participant sports fees Recr. lessons Recr. expend. Gyms/health clubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diabetes incidence Hypertension incidence Arthritis incidence Asthma incidence High cholesterol incidence Dental visits/teeth cleaning Smoking - some days Smoking - every day Physicians per capita 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multivitamin usage BMI Fruits and vegetable servings Fast food outlets Alcohol - drinks per month

Scoring

The Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) included in the study received points for each of the 50 criteria based on their relation to the other MSAs' scores in that data category. To compare categories, the most significant data element for any given category received a score of 100

points. The data element for each category that was associated with the most negative indicator of health received a score of 0 points. The remaining cities were assigned point values between 0 and 100 based on their data element's percentage of the range between the most desirable score in that category and the least desirable score in that category. In this way, the point values assigned to cities preserve the proportionality of the data points in relation to the data set while providing a common point scale. Category scores were weighted and aggregated to determine an overall healthy city score for each metro area.

Data Sources

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Study examined two million responses from the 1997-2003 editions of the BRFSS, which is the world's largest telephone Study, reaching over a quarter-million households annually.

Further notes on data and their sources:

- The number of respondents averaged 1,340 per metro area for these specific questions
- Consumer expenditures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and MediaMark (MRI): Expenditures were expressed as a percentage of each area's median household income to avoid bias toward higher spending in more affluent areas
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2003 demographic estimates, American Community Study
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census, current year estimates by Sperling's Best Places
- American Medical Association
- All the areas in the study refer to the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), as defined by the Census Bureau; MSAs include one or more central city and its surrounding counties.

For more information on Centrum's Healthiest Cities, visit [Pledge for Life](#).

The Centrum® Pledge for Life™

Centrum is releasing the new study in conjunction with the launch of the Centrum Pledge for Life, an interactive retail promotion and public awareness campaign designed to help Americans do more to improve their health by adding a multivitamin to their daily health routine.

"Americans are not always getting the essential nutrients they need from food alone, so developing the habit of taking a multivitamin every day is a simple way to help ensure that optimal daily requirements are met," said nationally recognized physician Kevin Soden. "Exercising, eating well, reducing stress, balancing work and leisure and engaging in positive social relationships are among the other daily habits that can contribute to overall good health—no matter where you live."

The Centrum Pledge for Life program invites people to answer a simple nine-question assessment about their overall health to help them determine if a multivitamin is right for them, and provides regular reminders to encourage the daily habit of taking a multivitamin along with a healthy diet. Consumers can take the Centrum Pledge for Life at selected retailers.

These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

About Sperling's BestPlaces

For over 16 years, Bert Sperling has been analyzing data about people and places and rating them for major publications. Sperling's concepts and methodology have been the basis of numerous studies since 1985, when he developed a software program named "Places, U.S.A." that allowed people to enter their personal preferences to find their own best place. Today, his company, Fast Forward Inc. (the producer of BestPlaces.net) is responsible for more "BestPlaces" studies and projects than any other organization. His Web site, [BestPlaces.net](#), provides accurate and up-to-date information about demographics, preferences, and the selection of the "best places" to live, work or retire, in a useful and entertaining format.

URL: <http://health.msn.com/fitness/articlepage.aspx?cp-documentid=100104508>