ACSM

AMERICAN FITNESS INDEX®

Actively Moving America to Better Health

2026 Data in Action: Calling for Change in America's 100 Largest Cities

ACSM AMERICAN FITNESS INDEX®

Elevance Health Foundation

Elevance Health | Foundation

July 14, 2026

Dear Partner in Promoting Fitness and Health:

We are pleased to share the results of the 2026 ACSM American Fitness Index. For 19 years, the Elevance Health Foundation has partnered with the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) to deliver this vital resource to help advance healthier communities. The Fitness Index has become a trusted and influential tool, helping communities understand the physical, behavioral, and social drivers of health, including access to food, care, and safe environments, while equipping advocates and city leaders with the data and insights needed to inspire meaningful change.

The Fitness Index evaluates the 100 largest cities in the United States to understand how community environments support active living and overall health. The Index combines measures of personal health behaviors, chronic disease outcomes, community infrastructure, and environmental factors to provide a comprehensive picture of how well cities promote fitness and well-being.

Arlington, Virginia continues its long-standing position as the nation's fittest city, reflecting strong performance across multiple indicators including physical activity levels, access to parks and recreational facilities, and supportive transportation infrastructure. Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, Seattle, and Denver round out the top five cities in this year's rankings.

In addition to examining rankings and community resources, this year's report highlights the intersection of physical activity, asthma, and air quality. Regular physical activity provides important health benefits for individuals living with asthma, but environmental conditions such as air pollution can influence when and where people feel comfortable being active. Together, these findings reinforce how communities shape opportunities for healthy living.

The Elevance Health Foundation deeply values our collaboration with ACSM and the shared vision of improving lives. ACSM's focus on extending and enriching lives through the power of movement aligns closely with our commitment to advancing whole-person health. Our work prioritizes areas such as maternal and infant health, behavioral health, and access to nutritious food, recognizing that these factors are deeply connected to physical activity and long-term well-being. The Fitness Index connects these goals by providing tangible data and insights that help communities take action.

We encourage you to review the full report to see where your community ranks and how it compares to the fittest cities in America. Use the data and resources to advocate locally for change. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

Shantanu Agrawal, MD
Chief Health Officer, Elevance Health

Get Active, Cities! Be the Change With the American Fitness Index

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) is committed to helping people live healthier, more active lives. The ACSM American Fitness Index (Fitness Index) measures how well the 100 largest U.S. cities support healthy, active lifestyles.

Cities with the highest Fitness Index scores are considered to have strong community fitness, similar to individuals having strong personal fitness. Top-ranked cities tend to have more resources that encourage healthy living and fewer barriers that make it harder for residents to be active. Cities lower in the rankings often face more challenges and have fewer resources that support healthy lifestyles.

But the Fitness Index is about more than rankings. It provides communities with data and tools to help drive meaningful change. The Fitness Index helps communities take action in three ways:

1. **Fuel Your Knowledge:** The Fitness Index brings together the most recent data on health behaviors, chronic disease outcomes, and community resources. This information helps residents, advocates, and city leaders better understand the factors that influence health and guide local decision-making.
2. **Celebrate Success & Inspire Action:** The Fitness Index celebrates strides that the ranked cities have made toward promoting a culture of health and fitness. It's a source of inspiration for city leaders and residents alike, motivating them to pursue even greater achievements. These successes can inspire other communities to pursue similar strategies that promote active living.
3. **Join the Movement:** The Fitness Index provides tools and resources to help city leaders and residents assess their communities' health and fitness landscape and work together to advocate for positive changes.

Healthy living starts where we live, learn, work, and play. The Fitness Index supports ACSM's vision to extend and enrich lives through the power of movement by helping communities support active lifestyles.

Your voice matters. By learning about the Fitness Index and engaging in local advocacy, you can help create a community that encourages healthy, active lives for everyone.

Be the Change

Building Healthier Cities Through Active Living

The 2026 American Fitness Index continued the annual evaluation of the 100 largest cities in the U.S., measuring how community conditions supported healthy lifestyles. By combining data on health behaviors, chronic conditions, community assets, and local policies and funding, the Fitness Index provides a snapshot of how well cities support active lifestyles. Accessible parks, safe walking and biking infrastructure, and public transit systems help make physical activity part of daily life.

At the same time, differences in health outcomes and community assets remained across cities. Rates of physical activity, chronic disease, and access to physical activity opportunities varied widely, reflecting differences in public policy, long-term investments, and community planning. This year's data also showed that while some indicators improved, such as air quality in many cities, others, including food insecurity, continued to worsen, highlighting the complex factors that shape community health.

Top 10 Ranked Cities

1. Arlington, VA
2. Washington, D.C.
3. Minneapolis, MN
4. Seattle, WA
5. Denver, CO
6. San Francisco, CA
7. Irvine, CA
8. Atlanta, GA
9. Madison, WI
10. Boston, MA

Top Ranked Cities

For 2026, Arlington, VA ranked first overall, continuing a pattern of strong performance across both personal health and community/environment indicators. While Arlington remained first overall and in the personal health sub-score, Washington, D.C. moved into the top spot for the community/environment sub-score, followed by Minneapolis, MN, with Arlington ranking third.

Washington, D.C.; Minneapolis, MN; Seattle, WA; and Denver, CO rounded out the top five cities overall. Several cities in the top 10 maintained this status for multiple years, demonstrating how sustained investments in community health create lasting benefits for communities.

Other noteworthy changes include Irvine, CA, which returned to the top 10, moving from 12th place last year to 7th in 2026. Boston, MA also reentered the top 10, moving from 13th place last year to 10th this year. These cities consistently performed well across multiple indicators, including rates of physical activity, access to parks and other community assets, and built environments that supported walking, biking, and public transit.

Three cities, Spokane, WA; Norfolk, VA; and Fremont, CA, that ranked in the top 10 last year were not included in the 2026 rankings because they are no longer among the 100 largest U.S. cities by population. New to the rankings this year are Frisco, TX (#32); Cape Coral, FL (#62); and Hialeah, FL (#67). These changes may have influenced movement in this year's rankings by altering the overall comparison group.

The full rankings, methods, data sources, and ranges are available at acsm.org/fitnessindex.

Opportunities for Improvement

At the other end of the rankings, cities including Oklahoma City, OK; Memphis, TN; Port St. Lucie, FL; Indianapolis, IN; and Lubbock, TX faced ongoing challenges across several indicators, including higher rates of chronic disease and lower rates of residents meeting physical activity guidelines. These findings highlight opportunities for targeted solutions to meet residents' needs.

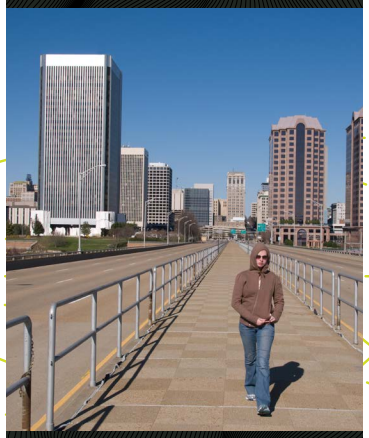
Trends Across Cities and Indicators

The 2026 Fitness Index also emphasized notable shifts in rankings and several trends across key indicators. While many cities maintained similar rankings from year to year, some communities experienced significant movement in the rankings.

Most Improved Cities

Several cities made substantial gains in their overall Fitness Index rankings compared with the previous year.

Richmond, VA (#20)

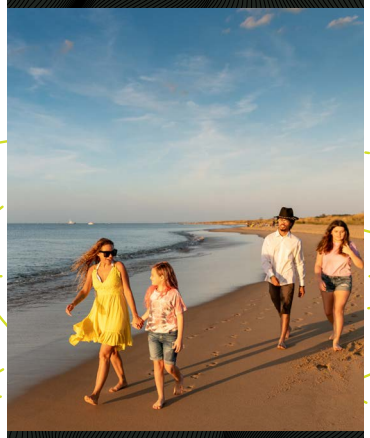


Improved the most, jumping **20 places** in the overall rankings and increasing its total score by **7.2 points** from the previous year.

Charlotte, NC (#42)

Moved up **19 places**, with a **6.2-point increase** in its total score.

Virginia Beach, VA (#61)



Improved by **18 places** and increased its total score by **6.5 points**.

Indicator Trends

In addition to changes in the overall rankings, several indicators showed notable trends compared to the previous report. Notably, food insecurity, which is closely linked to overall health and chronic disease risk, increased for the second consecutive year. Cities saw an average increase of 1.5 percentage points in food insecurity, rising from 12.9% last year to 14.4% in 2026. In total, 99 of 100 cities reported higher rates than the year before.

Multiple factors likely contributed to this trend, including economic pressures, increases in food costs, and changes in programs that support food access. The food insecurity data included in the 2026 Fitness Index reflect 2023 data, meaning that the most recent economic changes may not yet be fully captured. Because food prices continued to rise through 2024 and 2025, food insecurity may remain an important indicator to monitor in future editions of the Fitness Index.

New in 2026: Updates to Community/ Environment Indicators

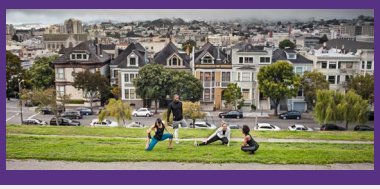
This year the Fitness Index included two updates to provide a more comprehensive picture of local spaces for recreation and active living. These changes better align the indicators with how cities plan, manage, and fund recreation assets.

The indicator previously measuring parks per 10,000 residents was replaced with parks as a percentage of city area. City officials have more control over the share of land dedicated to parks within a city versus the shifts in population changes.

The indicator previously measuring ball diamonds per 10,000 residents was expanded to outdoor athletic fields per 10,000 residents. This update captures a wider range of field types, including soccer, softball, football, and multi-use athletic fields that are increasingly common in urban parks. By broadening this measure, the Fitness Index better reflects the many ways communities support physical activity.

Top 10 Cities for Updated Indicators

Parks as % City Area



Anchorage, AK	**84.4**
Scottsdale, AZ	**30.5**
Chesapeake, VA	**29.0**
Irvine, CA	**26.5**
New Orleans, LA	**26.4**
North Las Vegas, NV	**25.1**
Washington, D.C.	**21.5**
San Francisco, CA	**21.4**
San Diego, CA	**20.9**
Boston, MA	**20.0**

Outdoor Athletic Fields/ 10,000 residents

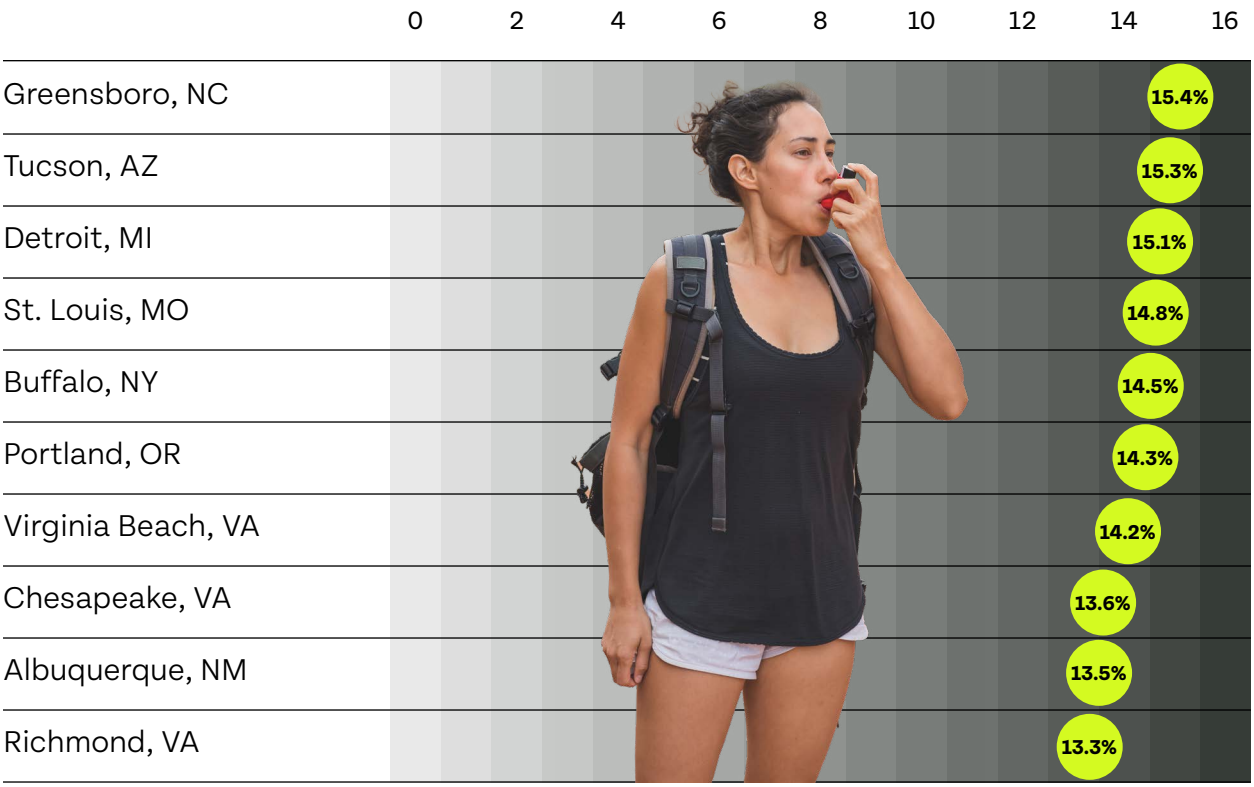
Chesapeake, VA	**8.1**
Madison, WI	**6.7**
Cincinnati, OH	**6.1**
Tulsa, OK	**5.7**
St. Louis, MO	**5.4**
Omaha, NE	**5.4**
Minneapolis, MN	**5.1**
Irvine, CA	**5.0**
St. Paul, MN	**4.9**
Boise, ID	**4.8**

Deep Dive: Asthma, Physical Activity, and Air Quality

Asthma remains one of the most common chronic conditions affecting both children and adults in the U.S. More than 28 million Americans live with asthma, and the condition continues to affect daily activities for many individuals.

Across the 100 cities included in the Fitness Index, the prevalence of asthma varied widely. On average, approximately 10% of adults reported having asthma; the prevalence across cities ranged from 5.4% to 15.4%. Some cities reported asthma rates nearly three times as high as others. Higher asthma prevalence in some cities may reflect a combination of environmental exposures, population health factors, access to care, and differences in how asthma is diagnosed and reported.

Cities with the Highest Asthma Prevalence



Physical activity may be one of the most important complementary strategies in managing asthma, while providing additional benefits for other common chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Approximately 78.8% of residents in the largest U.S. cities reported engaging in any exercise in the past month. However, only 30.5% met both aerobic and strength activity guidelines. Older adults with mild or moderate asthma often report lower levels of physical activity than their peers without asthma. Increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary behavior can improve health and quality of life, even later in life.

People sometimes assume that asthma will limit their exercise capacity or make higher-intensity activity unsafe. However, research consistently shows that for most people with well-controlled asthma, physical activity offers important health benefits and is not a reason to avoid exercise, even for those who experience exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB). Staying active with asthma has been associated with:

- reduced hospitalizations
- fewer school absences
- fewer primary care visits
- reduced use of rescue medications
- improved ability to manage asthma symptoms
- improved overall quality of life[1].

With proper symptom management, most people with asthma can safely participate in physical activity, including recreational sports and everyday movement such as walking, biking, and swimming.

People with severe or poorly controlled asthma should consult their health care provider before starting or increasing physical activity. A health care provider can help develop a plan to be active based on individual symptoms and treatment.

Air Quality and Asthma

Environmental conditions can influence when and where people feel comfortable being active. Outdoor air quality plays an important role for individuals with asthma and other respiratory conditions. Air pollutants such as ozone, fine particulate matter, and pollen can irritate the airways and trigger asthma symptoms, especially during vigorous outdoor activity.

The Fitness Index's air quality indicator reports the percentage of days each year with "good" air quality based on the EPA Air Quality Index (AQI) data. Across the 100 cities in the Fitness Index, communities experienced on average good air quality on 51% of days each year. However, air quality varied widely, ranging from 9.0% to 98.4% of days across the top 100 cities. This difference in air quality can dramatically impact the ability to safely participate in outdoor activities.

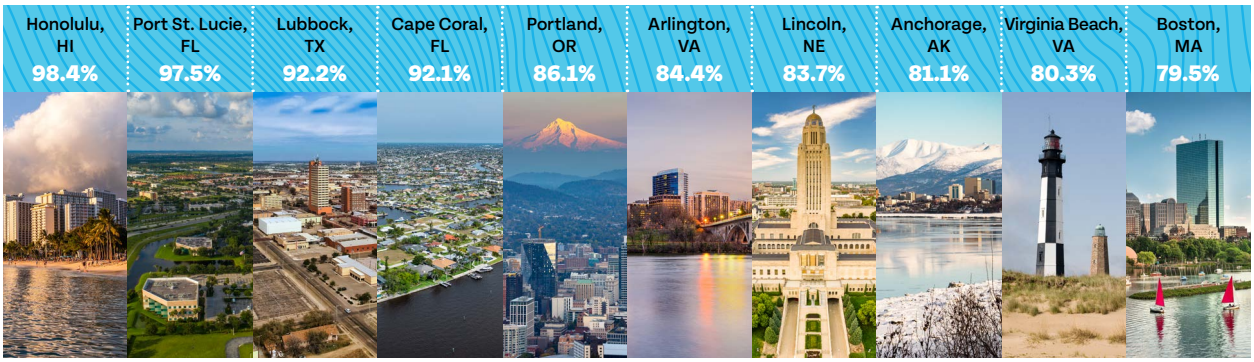
In cities with fewer days of good air quality, residents, particularly those with asthma and other respiratory conditions, face additional barriers to outdoor physical activity. Many of the cities with the fewest good air quality days are located in the Southwest and southern California, where geography, traffic patterns, and regional weather and air conditions can contribute to higher levels of air pollution.

Cities with the Fewest Good Air Quality Days[2]

1. Source: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, "Recommendations for Physical Activity in Asthma" (2022).

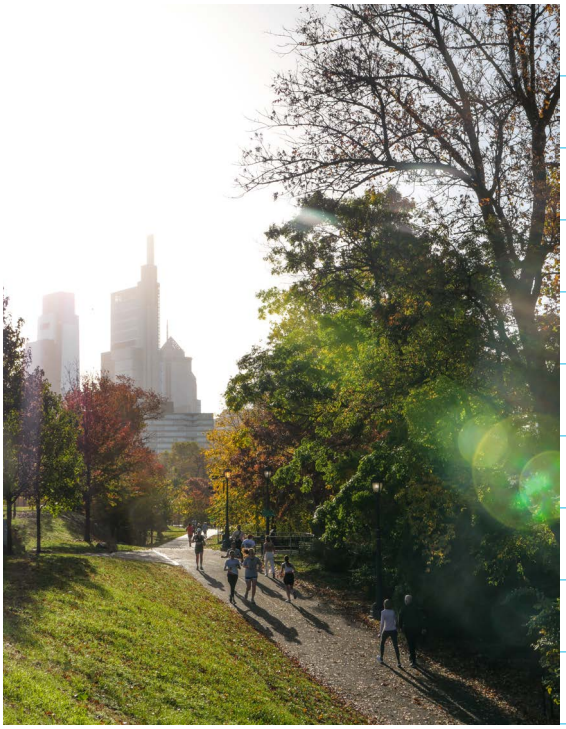
2. Air quality is reported at the county level; as a result, cities within the same county share the same air quality measurements.

Cities with the Most Good Air Quality Days



Many cities, especially across the Midwest and Northeast, experienced double-digit improvements in good air quality days, likely reflecting improved regional air conditions compared with the wildfire-affected air quality observed the previous year.

Cities with the Greatest Improvement in Good Air Quality Days



- Philadelphia, PA – ***24.6% increase***
- Milwaukee, WI – ***23.3% increase***
- Madison, WI – ***21.7% increase***
- St. Paul, MN – ***20.9% increase***
- Minneapolis, MN – ***19.0% increase***
- Wichita, KS – ***18.4% increase***
- Greensboro, NC – ***17.9% increase***
- Louisville, KY – ***17.1% increase***
- Richmond, VA – ***17.0% increase***
- Boston, MA – ***16.2% increase***

Adjusting Activity When Air Quality Changes

When outdoor air quality is poor, people in general, not just those with asthma, can adjust when, where, and how they are active. Checking the Air Quality Index (AQI) can help identify times of day when air quality is better, and potentially safer. Some people may choose to exercise earlier in the morning or later in the evening when pollution levels are lower, while others opt for indoor activities such as walking indoors, visiting recreation centers, or participating in group fitness programs.

Together, these findings highlight the close connections between physical activity, respiratory health, and environmental conditions. Communities that ensure clean air and accessible recreational spaces allow residents, including those living with asthma, to stay active and support their overall health.

Supporting Active Living for People with Asthma

Cities influence whether residents, including those with asthma, can safely participate in physical activity. Policies and community initiatives that improve air quality and expand opportunities for active living can help reduce barriers to physical activity for all residents.

One important area for action is local transportation infrastructure. Transportation options influence both how much people move and the quality of the air they breathe. Cities that encourage walking, biking, and public transit often experience additional benefits, including lower vehicle emissions, improved air quality, and more opportunities for daily physical activity.

Active transportation allows residents to incorporate movement into everyday routines such as commuting to work and school or running errands. Communities with higher levels of active commuting often see additional benefits for both population health and the environment.

Cities can support these goals by:

- expanding safe walking and biking infrastructure
- improving access to reliable and convenient public transit
- adopting policies that reduce vehicle emissions
- supporting parks, recreation spaces, and indoor activity options

By improving air quality and expanding opportunities for safe movement, cities can help ensure that more residents, including those with asthma, are able to stay active and support their overall health.

Looking Ahead

The 2026 American Fitness Index once again emphasizes the important role communities play in supporting healthy, active lifestyles. Safe places to move, accessible recreation opportunities, and cleaner environments make it easier for residents to stay physically active and maintain their health.

Environmental conditions also influence how and where people can be active. For individuals living with asthma and other respiratory conditions, good air quality can make a meaningful difference in the ability to participate in outdoor physical activity.

The Fitness Index offers communities a valuable tool to better understand these connections and identify opportunities for improvement. By using the most recent data to guide decision making, cities can help more residents move more and enjoy healthier lives.

A Call to Action

2026 Rankings

Explore the city comparison tool to access the rankings, scores, data, and methods, and to discover how your city can help residents lead a healthy, active lifestyle: https://americanfitnessindex.org/.

2025-2026 TREND	OVERALL RANK		PERSONAL HEALTH RANK	COMMUNITY + ENVIRONMENT RANK
→	1	Arlington, VA	1	3
→	2	Washington, D.C.	3	1
↑	3	Minneapolis, MN	7	2
↓	4	Seattle, WA	2	17
→	5	Denver, CO	8	7
↓	6	San Francisco, CA	13	9
↑	7	Irvine, CA	14	13
→	8	Atlanta, GA	12	19
↓	9	Madison, WI	15	16
↑	10	Boston, MA	16	14
↓	11	San Diego, CA	5	36
↑	12	Plano, TX	10	30
↑	13	Oakland, CA	11	31
↑	14	St. Paul, MN	30	5
→	15	San Jose, CA	4	53
↑	16	Boise, ID	23	22
↓	17	Lincoln, NE	24	29
↑	18	Albuquerque, NM	41	11
↓	19	Chicago, IL	43	12
↑	20	Richmond, VA	40	18
↑	21	Chula Vista, CA	6	78
↓	22.5	Pittsburgh, PA	62	4
↓	22.5	Sacramento, CA	42	20
→	24	Buffalo, NY	47.5	15
↑	25	Honolulu, HI	29	32
↑	26	New York, NY	25	35
↑	27	Cincinnati, OH	65	6
↓	28	Austin, TX	19	55
↓	29	Portland, OR	39	33
↑	30	Omaha, NE	49	24
↓	31	Aurora, CO	22	57
—	32	Frisco, TX	9	94
↑	33.5	Raleigh, NC	31	43
↑	33.5	Long Beach, CA	36	38
↑	35	Santa Ana, CA	20	71
↓	36	Newark, NJ	28	51
↑	37	Tampa, FL	58	28
↓	38	Jersey City, NJ	34	45
→	39	Miami, FL	47.5	34
↓	40	Colorado Springs, CO	32	48
↓	41	Cleveland, OH	66	21
↑	42	Charlotte, NC	18	84
↑	43	Dallas, TX	35	47
↑	44	Houston, TX	26	64
↓	45	St. Petersburg, FL	63	27
↑	46	Milwaukee, WI	76	8
↑	47	Anaheim, CA	17	90
→	48	Scottsdale, AZ	52	37
↑	49	Durham, NC	21	86
↑	50	Winston-Salem, NC	27	67
↓	51	Anchorage, AK	44	46
↓	52	Columbus, OH	60	40
↑	53	Reno, NV	38	63
↓	54	Philadelphia, PA	84	10
↑	55	Los Angeles, CA	33	74
↑	56	Baltimore, MD	78	23
↑	57	New Orleans, LA	79	26
↑	58	Phoenix, AZ	53	60
↓	59	Glendale, AZ	50	62
↑	60	St. Louis, MO	81	25

2026 Rankings

2025-2026 TREND	OVERALL RANK		PERSONAL HEALTH RANK	COMMUNITY + ENVIRONMENT RANK
↑	61	Virginia Beach, VA	64	49
—	62	Cape Coral, FL	37	91
↑	63	Riverside, CA	56	70
↓	64	Orlando, FL	68	52
↑	65	Nashville, TN	59	68
↓	66	Chandler, AZ	55	75
—	67	Hialeah, FL	57	81
↓	68	Mesa, AZ	54	88
↑	69	Fort Worth, TX	45	97
↑	70	Gilbert, AZ	46	96
↓	71	Lexington, KY	67	69
↑	72	Garland, TX	51	95
↓	73	Tucson, AZ	82	44
↓	74	Fresno, CA	61	85
↑	75	El Paso, TX	77	56
↑	76	Henderson, NV	88	39
↑	77	Greensboro, NC	73	65.5
↑	78	Arlington, TX	70	76.5
↓	79	Fort Wayne, IN	69	82
↑	80	San Antonio, TX	72	79
↓	81	Toledo, OH	94	41
→	82	Kansas City, MO	92	42
↑	83	Corpus Christi, TX	75	80
↓	84	Jacksonville, FL	91	50
↓	85	Stockton, CA	74	83
↓	86	Irving, TX	71	93
→	87	Las Vegas, NV	87	61
↓	88	Laredo, TX	83	73
↓	89	Chesapeake, VA	93	59
↑	90	North Las Vegas, NV	86	76.5
↓	91	Tulsa, OK	99	58
↑	92	Detroit, MI	100	54
↑	93	Wichita, KS	95	72
↓	94	Louisville, KY	98	65.5
↓	95	Bakersfield, CA	89	89
↑	96	Lubbock, TX	85	99
↓	97	Indianapolis, IN	90	92
↓	98	Port St. Lucie, FL	80	100
↓	99	Memphis, TN	96	87
→	100	Oklahoma City, OK	97	98

KEY

IST QUARTILE

2ND QUARTILE

3RD QUARTILE

4TH QUARTILE

→ ↗ ↘ CHANGE IN OVERALL RANK COMPARED TO 2025

Data Sources

The Fitness Index uses a variety of data sources to calculate the annual scores and rankings.

- 2024 American Community Survey – U.S. Census
- 2021-2024 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, County Data – CDC
- 2024 Environmental Protection Agency
- 2023 Map the Meal Gap – Feeding America®
- 2023 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- 2025 Smart Growth America/ National Complete Streets Coalition
- 2025 Trust for the Public Land – City Park Facts and ParkScore®
- 2025 Walk Score® and Bike Score®