

“Walking as a Way of Life”—October is International Walk to School Month



I have to say that I took part of the above title from an AARP Bulletin on the benefits of walking for an older person’s health. However, with over 20 years of research studies with numerous programs involving walking as the main fitness activity for people of all age groups, that title applies to the young and the old.

With the International Walk to School month approaching, why not get organized and make “walking as a way of life.”

Health professionals prescribe 30 minutes a day five days a week as a basic prescription. Why? The body functions more efficiently by improving the heart’s ability to deliver oxygen to the working muscles, thus lowering the resting heart rate. If the body is able to work more effectively then there is a decrease in the chances for disease.

Studies show that walking reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis while controlling weight, decreasing depression and improving cognitive ability. Knowing all of the benefits of walking, how can you not want to put on the sneakers and hit the road?

In addition, walking does not take special equipment. It is easy to do. It is safer. Anyone can participate with success. It can provide “social” time; it is environmentally engaging and cleaner.

The Division of Wildlife reports that children are spending less time outside than they did even 10 years ago. The “Walking School Bus” is a Safe Routes to School program supported by the Colorado Department of Transportation that can encourage enjoyment of the outdoors while instilling positive life-long habits for fitness for children and adults.

Parents can help organize a group of neighboring students to walk together to school as

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weather permits. Walking together in a group is safer than walking alone, as cars are better able to see a group of students as opposed to just one student.

In addition, students have time to enjoy friendships and interact with their environment. A common sight in the fall is kids stomping through a pile of leaves in the gutter to hear the crunching noise. Kids are always quick to point out those simple things in life, such as a squirrel scurrying up a tree. Often, conversations revolve around making plans for the rest of the day, like what game to play at recess or whose house is everyone going to play at after school.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School sites, “There are a couple of ways that walking and bicycling to school may be related to higher levels of physical activity. Children may obtain physical activity during the commute to and from school while obtaining similar amounts as non-active commuters throughout the rest of the day. Or, active travel to school may make children more inclined to be physically active at other times of the day.”

“Children who walk or bicycle to school are more likely to walk or bicycle to other destinations in their neighborhood than children who are driven to school.” Thus, possibly indicating children will make good decisions about being physically active when given the chance and there is the possibility that they will later in life as well.

Remember that 30-60 minutes of activity broken into smaller segments of 10-15 minutes throughout the day has significant health benefits.

Parents, high school or junior high school students and older adults can help be an example for children and receive their own health benefits by helping to organize walking groups that live around them to create their own Walking School Bus daily to and from school.

Finally, this is a great way to teach safety while on the road walking or biking. To find out more of how to promote this activity in your home or school district go to www.walkbiketoschool.org.

Holyoke Enterprise September 27, 2012

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