

Take Steps Toward A Walking-Friendly Community

(NAPSA)—Walking can be a simple form of exercise and transportation, unless busy streets and tight schedules stand in the way. Not to worry, say public-health experts; something helpful is afoot.

Around the country, researchers are working with communities to create pedestrian-friendly facilities and programs that can help people work some physical activity into their day. At the heart of their collaboration is the Prevention Research Centers (PRC) Program, a network of 37 academic and community partnerships sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to find new ways to promote good health.

As part of a research project to help communities organize and develop advocacy skills, the PRC in South Carolina guided churches, nonprofit organizations, residents, and the local parks and recreation department in forming a coalition to promote physical activity. The coalition soon directed the construction of walking tracks inside six public parks in Sumter County, while new trees were planted in the parks; trash and weeds were removed; and new playground equipment, water fountains, grills and signs were installed—community improvements made to encourage residents to use the parks and stay active.

“Now we need to know if residents can help motivate each other to walk regularly through walk-buddy programs and other promotional strategies,” said Steven Hooker, Ph.D., who helped the community organize its coalition and develop its advocacy skills.

At the PRC in St. Louis, Missouri, researchers and community partners are trying to help parents and children work short walks into their weekday schedules by organizing walk-to-school programs.



Walking is good for your health and good for your community.

“We focus on elementary schools because they are usually located within a neighborhood, and in many communities, students would be able to reach them on foot with a bit of adult supervision,” said Amy Eyler, Ph.D., co-principal investigator in the Physical Activity Policy Research Network, a group funded by the PRC Program to study how local decision making can encourage physical activity.

“Walk-to-school programs can take a lot of organizing,” said Dr. Eyler. “But when communities are willing to support them, these programs can help parents and their kids spend some healthy time together, cut vehicle traffic on school grounds, and help children arrive at school feeling calm and ready to learn.”

Tips for Walkers

- Keep this rule of thumb in mind: On average, a person weighing 150 lbs. walking 1.5 miles in 30 minutes burns about 150 calories.

- Discuss walk-to-school programs at PTA meetings and school conferences. Consider petitioning local leaders for sidewalks and walking tracks.

- Look for walking programs at shopping malls, where weather and traffic are not concerns.

For more information about the PRC Program, go to www.cdc.gov/prc.