

Benefits of Walking Your Child to School

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For your child

- Walking to school can help your child do better in school.
 - Exercise: After physical activity, kids pay better attention in school, are less moody, and have better impulse control.
 - Time in nature: Spending time outside improves academic performance, ability to concentrate in the classroom, and improves self-control.
 - We see these benefits with all children, but *especially* with children with ADHD.
- On a walk to school, there's plenty of learning opportunities that don't happen at school:
 - Nature: Nature provides an always-changing experience – from autumn leaves to winter frost to spring blossoms. You can take time to stop, observe, and learn.
 - Science and Engineering: You may pass by construction projects, clogged storm drains, people using power tools, and other opportunities to learn about engineering.
 - Traffic rules and navigation: Each time you walk, you're teaching pedestrian safety. You can also teach about street names, addresses, alternate routes, parking rules, turn signals, etc.
 - Good neighbor skills: You can model picking up litter and other little things that make your neighborhood a more pleasant place for all.
- You're teaching a lifelong habit of walking instead of driving: Amongst children 5 - 15, on average, only 15% of their total trips are walking. Can you increase that for your child?
- Social / Independence Benefits: Walking gives you the chance to interact with the other families that walk. Older children may form a "walking bus" where a group of them walk home together. This gives them a chance to connect with and socialize with these other kids, and also helps them build skills at independently navigating their world.
- Exercise: They get all the health benefits described below.

For both of you:

- Walking through the school yard each morning and afternoon (rather than driving through the pick-up line) gives you a closer connection with the school, other kids and teachers.
- Walking home from school together is a great chance to re-connect and catch up on the news of the day. If you drive home, your mind is mostly focused on driving. Walking is more relaxed, slower paced, and doesn't take much attention, so you can be much more tuned in to each other.

For you:

- Free Exercise. Instead of paying for a gym you never make it to, walking to school is free exercise that you have to make happen every day – you can't put it off!
- Regular exercise. Plenty of research shows that more short bouts of exercise is better for our heart and our metabolism than a few long bouts. If you're a 15 minute walk from school, that's 30 minutes round trip. You start your day with some exercise to get you going. Then, after a day of sedentary work, you get another burst of exercise.
- Healthy Exercise:
 - Healthy for your heart: Walking improves blood pressure and cholesterol, and reduces your risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. It also reduces risk of diabetes. Heart benefits happen even if you take just a few slow walks a week.
 - Healthy for your brain: long-term walkers have fewer signs of memory loss/dementia.

- Healthy for bones and joints: Walking around a mile a day leads to less osteoporosis in older women, without the high rate of exercise related injury that runners experience. Adding 60 seconds of high impact exercise to your walk (running, jumping jacks) helps strengthen bones.
- Reduces risk of breast and colon cancer.
- Walking also improves your mood, and reduces depression.
- Efficient use of time: If you're within a mile of school, it may seem that driving is faster, but if you factor in the time to load your child into the car, wait in the pick-up line and other overhead, it might not be as big a difference as you think. Plus, since it's doing double-duty as exercise time, you're saving the time it would have taken you to drive to the gym, change clothes, shower off, etc. And, you can use this time to listen to music, or podcasts, or make phone calls to friends.

For the environment:

- Emissions are highest when a car engine is cold, in the first few miles of each trip. One of the best things you can do to reduce air pollution is leave the car at home for short trips. If you walk to school twice a week, you reduce carbon emissions by 131 pounds a year.

Barriers to walking to school - and how to overcome them

55% of children travel to school in a private car. Here are parent's most common barriers

- Distance to School – The average distance to school *has* increased. (In 1969, 41% of kids lived less than a mile from school. Not it's 31%.) But even amongst those who live less than a mile away, they're much less likely to walk now (35%) than they were in 1969 (when 89% walked.)
 - If you're too far to walk on every trip, could you make the walk one or two afternoons a week? Could you drive part way and walk part way?
- Weather. Different climates provide different weather challenges, and there are definitely days when the weather is really unpleasant for a walk. But for most days, having the right clothes makes a big difference. Getting good outdoor clothes can be pricey, but just think how much money you save on gas, wear and tear on your vehicle, and on a gym membership by walking!
- Traffic Danger – As more people drive short distances, there's more cars on the road. As fewer people walk, cities place a lower budget priority on crosswalks and sidewalks. As pedestrians become less common, drivers are less likely to remember to watch for them.
 - Can you advocate in your community for making your neighborhood pedestrian friendly? In the meantime, increase safety while walking by choosing high visibility clothing.
- Crime Danger – Clearly, there are neighborhoods where it is risky to walk through. But in general, although many people believe that the world is a "more dangerous place than it used to be", statistics actually show that in most places, crime rates are down.
 - One way to increase safety is to travel in a group. Some neighborhoods organize a walking train, where there's an adult "engine" leading the way, and an adult "caboose" at the end, making sure all the kids in the middle stay safe.
- Schedule / Other Commitments – Sometimes a parent's work schedule means that walking is not feasible, or a parent has other reasons they need to drive on any given day – errands to be run, or whatever. If this is your situation, ask your manager whether there's any possibility of making a slight adjustment to your work schedule, or consider talking to neighbors about a walk-pool / walking bus, where you take turns being the grown-up walking the kids to or from school.
- If you have barriers you can't figure out how to get around, ask other families who *do* walk to your school for their advice on how to make it work.

For citations to sources on all the research referenced here, go to www.GoodDaysWithKids.com