

MEET MAX

Second-grader Maxwell Fenton wakes up and gets ready for school with extra energy today. He got up 10 minutes early because he's excited he's walking to school today instead of taking the bus. Max is eager to head out the door with his father. They will pick up his best friend Jackie, her mom, and other neighborhood kids along the way.

Two adults walk to school with Max and his seven friends. The adults regularly remind the children to stay on the sidewalk and to watch for traffic from driveways. At busy Front Street, the parents line the children up in pairs, wait for drivers to signal, and cross carefully in a group. After a comfortable 18-minute walk, Max and his friends arrive at school energized, alert, and looking forward to the day. In their brisk stride home, the parents accumulate 30 minutes of physical activity, the Surgeon General's recommended daily dose.

At the end of the school day, Max's dad and Jackie's mom walk home with the children. The same adults walk with the group on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; other adults join the children on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Because of these walks, Max is less likely to be overweight or have other health problems linked to inactivity. He learns about his community and how to get around it safely on foot. His community has less traffic, especially around the school, which means there's less pollution and less chance of being hit by a car. Max's parents have become aware of some things in their neighborhood that need improvement and they can bring up these issues at the next town meeting. In addition, crime has gone down in the neighborhood because of the increased presence of adults each day.

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By the time he is a 5th grader—the last year of elementary school—getting around on foot or by bicycle is a way of life for Max. He's active, healthy, and physically fit, and his parents are comfortable with his skills and awareness. Max has a growing circle of friends' homes and neighborhood destinations where he is allowed to walk on his own. The KidsWalk-to-School program has affected Max's neighborhood—the sidewalks have been resurfaced and a crossing guard now works at the busy Front Street intersection to safely direct pedestrian traffic. Because of the success of the KidsWalk-to-School program, during a recent budget debate parents voted to forego school bus service in their neighborhood. The money saved with one less bus to maintain and run helps pay for school physical education programs that otherwise would have been cut. So Max, his friends, and his community win all the way around.

—Mark Fenton

Hi! I'm Max.
Follow me, and I'll walk
you through the
program. It's easy.

