

Physical Activity: A Critical Element of Good Health

Trails for Health is a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiative to help Americans of all ages achieve the health benefits of physical activity by increasing opportunities for physical activity and helping to make it an integral part of community life. Trails for Health supports the Department of Health and Human Services' *Steps to a HealthierUS* initiative, which promotes behavior changes and encourages healthier lifestyle choices to help advance the President's goal of building a stronger, healthier nation.

The significant benefits of physical activity include helping to

- Control weight.
- Control high blood pressure.
- Reduce risk for type 2 diabetes, heart attack, and colon cancer.
- Reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Reduce arthritis pain and disability.
- Prevent osteoporosis and falls.



"Few factors contribute so much to successful aging as regular physical activity, and it's never too late to start."

— Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary, U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services

Moreover, physical activity doesn't need to be strenuous to be beneficial: people of all ages benefit from moderate physical activity, such as 30 minutes of brisk walking five or more times a week.

Promoting Trails for Health

Through Trails for Health, CDC provides information and technical assistance to help states promote trails as an enjoyable, versatile, and practical means of engaging in physical activity. Trails for Health supports CDC's Active Community Environments (ACES), an initiative to promote walking, bicycling, and the development of accessible recreation facilities. ACES was developed in response to data that suggest that characteristics of our communities such as proximity of facilities, street design, and availability of pedestrian and bicycle facilities such as trails play a significant role in promoting or discouraging physical activity.



Trails: A Scientifically Proven Asset

Scientific evidence from the *Guide to Community Preventive Services* shows that providing access to places for physical activity, such as trails, increases the level of physical activity in a community. Trails can provide a wide variety of opportunities for being physically active:

- Walking, jogging, running, and hiking
- Rollerblading/in-line skating
- Wheelchair recreation
- Bicycling
- Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing
- Fishing
- Hunting
- Horseback riding
- Forestry work

"Regular physical activity is such a crucial part of good health; our goal is to help people understand that even modest activity such as walking or gardening is a step in the right direction."

— Julie L. Gerberding, MD, MPH
Director, Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Seniors Can Benefit Most

Americans aged 65 and older are the least active age group in the United States: approximately 35% of those aged 65-74 years and 46% of those aged 75 or older report no leisure-time physical activity at all. Most seniors (80%) have at least one chronic condition, and 50% have at least two. Research has shown that seniors who have healthy lifestyles that include regular physical activity reduce their risk for chronic diseases and have half the rate of disability of those who do not.



Healthy Trails, Healthy People

Healthy Trails, Healthy People is the theme of National Trails Day, sponsored by the American Hiking Society. Held the first Saturday of every June, National Trails Day is a nationwide celebration of trails that features more than 2,000 events hosted by trail clubs, conservation organizations, agencies, and businesses.

Available Resources

Access to trails and trail clubs:

For information on over 30,000 trails, visit Trail Finder at the American Hiking Society's Web site: www.americanhiking.org

Volunteering with national parks and forests:

www.volunteer.gov and www.recreation.gov

HealthierUS and Steps to a HealthierUS initiatives:

Visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *HealthierUS* Web site for information on fitness, prevention, nutrition, and healthy choices: www.healthierUS.gov

Physical activity:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's nutrition and physical activity Web site: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa

For more information on Trails for Health, write to:
TRAILS FOR HEALTH Information
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
4770 Buford Highway NE, K-46
Atlanta, GA 30341-3717
E-mail: ccdinfo@cdc.gov

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Trails for Health

PROMOTING HEALTHY
LIFESTYLES & ENVIRONMENTS



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

