

## One Step at a Time: Walking to School Can Benefit Your Child and the Whole Community

This school year, make your child “miss” the bus. Or put those car keys back on the counter or in the drawer.

Why? Because having your child walk (or bike, if it’s too far away) to school has many advantages.

For starters, walking to school is an easy way to get the blood pumping and meet the physical activity requirements that scientists say will help your kids lead longer and healthier lives.

The *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* suggest that children and teenagers be physically active for at least 60 minutes a day. Cuts in recess and physical education classes in some school districts have made that more difficult to do, and that’s where you (the parent or caregiver of a child) can come to the rescue by incorporating a walk or bike ride to school into your child’s day.



If you’re worried about safety, rally together with some neighbors and organize walk-to-school programs as a group. Here are a few suggestions for how to get started:

- Visit <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>, a resource that helps communities create safe walking and biking routes to and from schools by providing community members with knowledge and technical information.
- Recruit parent volunteers as morning or afternoon crossing guards to preserve safe routes to school. Parents and kids can even form a “walking school bus” to ensure that all walking kids have some adult supervision.
- Designate one day each week as a “walk-to-school day” in your community. WalktoSchool.org (<http://www.walktoschool.org>) provides tips on how to start up walking events in your school or community.
- Set up a mileage club that offers healthy rewards to children for walking or biking to school and/or friendly competitions with other schools in the district.
- Organize a walk-to-school event around the school track, field, or property.

For additional resources that can help your children get their daily dose of physical activity (and more!), check out the **We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition)** Web site at <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>. **We Can!**, developed by the National Institutes of Health, provides strategies and resources for parents, caregivers and communities to help children ages 8–13 maintain a healthy weight by eating right, increasing physical activity and reducing screen time. On the Web site you will find physical activity resources, activity plans, tips on making family time active time and ideas for how to create a more active lifestyle.