

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY HEALTHIER



It's clear that people eat healthier foods and enjoy more physical activity when it's easy to do. So how can we make it easier?

Here are some simple things you can do in your neighborhood, school and workplace. With your help, we can make sure everyone has access to healthy foods and places to play, walk and ride.

► HEALTHY SCHOOLS

When children are physically active and eat well, they do better on tests, have better school attendance and are more focused in their learning. Whether you are a parent or a principal, here are ways you can help your kids be healthier and have fun!

Eating Well

- Serve healthy foods at events. Work with your PTA, teachers and principal to make it a policy to serve healthy food as classroom rewards and at school functions, including evening events, meetings, fundraisers and parties.
- Reward kids without sweets. Ask your teacher or the principal to reward kids with extra recess, fun pencils or erasers or time for a special game – not sweets.
- Make it easy to drink water. Ask your child's school to offer drinking water.
- Talk to the school about fundraisers. Consider what is being sold through fundraisers and choose companies that provide non-food options, such as plants, candles or wrapping paper. Consider organizing a walk-a-thon that combines fundraising with physical activity.

Being Active

- Start a "walking school bus." Talk with other neighborhood parents about taking turns walking with groups of children to and from school.
- Speak up for PE. Tell your school board and/or principal that kids need physical activity and physical education as a regular part of the school day.
- Make it easier to walk or bike to school. Talk with parents, teachers and your principal about getting involved in Safe Routes to School to make it easier for kids to commute to school by foot or bike.
- Show what kids need to bike or walk to school. Invite neighbors, school leaders, community leaders and reporters to walk or bike the routes students use – or could use – to get to school. This is a powerful way to show people why safe routes to school are needed.

Resources

Safe Routes to School: www.saferoutesinfo.org

Alliance for a Healthier Generation: www.healthiergeneration.org

Healthy Kids, Focused Students: www.mpls.k12.mn.us

► HEALTHY WORKSITES

Worksites are an ideal place to encourage healthy behaviors, making it easy for people to get – and stay – healthy. Healthy workers are more productive and have reduced health care costs, an incentive for employers to get involved as well.

Eating Well

- Ask for healthy vending machine choices. Start a conversation with your employer and co-workers about offering healthy choices in vending machines and taking out unhealthy drinks and foods. Most vending machine operators have healthier alternatives.
- Talk to your employer about starting a healthy meeting policy. Promote healthy choices at work by serving healthy meals and snacks during meetings.
- Talk to your employer about conducting Lunch-and-Learn sessions on various health-related topics, including nutrition, stress management or healthy cooking.

Being Active

- Talk to your employer or team about implementing walking meetings. Walking meetings are perfect for smaller groups of people. Ask people to keep comfortable shoes at work for meetings that exercise both body and brain.
- Develop walking maps of your workplace. Measure the distance in halls and around the building for setting walking goals. Develop walking maps, and share throughout your company or organization.
- Talk to your employer about providing bicycle racks. Make it easier to bike to work by having a safe and convenient place to park bikes securely.
- Talk to your employer about incorporating activity into company events, such as picnics and conferences.

Resources

Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota: www.mnalliance.org

Prevention Minnesota: www.preventionminnesota.com

Eat Well Work Well: www.eatwellworkwell.org

▶ HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS

It's important that people have access to healthy foods and opportunities to be active right in their neighborhoods. Look at yours. Is it easy to get fresh, healthy foods? Or is junk food unfortunately the easier choice? Are there parks or recreation centers nearby and other safe places to ride bikes, take walks and play hopscotch?

Eating Healthy

- Request healthy foods. Ask for fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods—and less junk food—at your neighborhood stores and restaurants.
- Request healthy drinks, meals and snacks. Ask your child's school, after school program, camps, sports leagues and child care provider to serve healthy food and drinks instead of junk food and sugary drinks.
- Buy locally grown produce. Minnesota Grown provides a list of farmers markets and farms that deliver food boxes. If you qualify for WIC or EBT (food assistance), you can use it to pay for food at many local farmers markets.
- Share what's important to you at childcare. Let your child care provider know that you want your child to have time for active play every day, healthy foods for meals and snacks, and water and low-fat milk instead of sugary drinks.

Being active

- Identify safety concerns. Talk with your neighbors about things in your neighborhood that make it unsafe for kids to be physically active.
- Limit screen time at childcare. Start a conversation with your childcare provider about limits for TV and video games (and no screen time for children under two).
- Speak up. Visit your city's website to find contact information for your city council and to look for listings of community meetings and other opportunities to get involved. Let them know why parks, sidewalks, crosswalks and bike paths are important to you. Your opinion can make a difference!
- Join a group. Get involved with local groups (such as your neighborhood association or bike club) that share your interest in safe places for active living. Work with the group to participate in community planning meetings and other city planning efforts.
- Keep the playground and gym open. Ask your local school's principal about keeping the playground and gym open for use when school is not in session.

Resources

Bike Walk Move: www.bikewalkmove.org

Minnesota Grown: www3.mda.state.mn.us/mngrown



Making it Better

CREATING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY TOGETHER

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