

3.08

MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES MORE WALKABLE

walk

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT — WALKING FOR HEALTH & LIFE

I have experienced first hand the connection between walking and health. My husband has two artificial hips and a leg that has been broken. His daily walks and the steps he takes just getting around are critical to his health. As he would tell you, “Walking loosens me up, gets me moving and keeps me going.” I have seen the benefit of walking in my mom’s health. She’s 95, with some dementia. Yet she can still walk, still climb steps, still eats well, still knows her children and grandchildren and still enjoys our conversation. As I often tell her, each walk and each step matters. Her walking keeps her in better health.

I also have seen how walking is an integral part of my children’s lives. Now 32 and 29, neither son owns a car. They have always relied heavily on walking and public transportation as their preferred way to get around. They count on walking as a reliable source of exercise in their

busy schedules. The walking has developed in them good physical habits as well as a sense of curiosity and independence. Finally, I personally feel the health benefits of walking daily. Although I am blessed with good health, there isn’t a day that I don’t feel better physically and mentally when I do a lot of walking.

If your doctor could prescribe a pill that could help you lower blood pressure, blood sugar levels and cholesterol, reduce your chances of getting cancer and dementia, and potentially allow you to live longer—wouldn’t you really want that pill? As the articles in this newsletter will show, that miracle pill is WALKING. Therefore, this year, as you think of what to give those you love, think about encouraging them to walk more. It is a gift that anyone can give and it is a gift for their health and their life.

Liz Levin *Liz*

Boston

BY COREY FREEDMAN

NYC dwellers live longer

It is almost a cliché that country life is healthier than city life. At the start of the Industrial Revolution, crowded living conditions, pollution and lack of sanitation caused epidemics of disease and early death in the cities. The reaction against these conditions in 18th and 19th century Britain led to a deep-seated belief in the superiority of country living that is also buried deep within the American psyche.

But now the New York City Department of Health has released new figures that paint a different picture: the life expectancy for New Yorkers is 78.6 years, nine months longer than the average American and increasing at a rate faster than the rest of the country. Several developments contributed to this trend. Public policies in the nineties helped bring down the rates of crime, drug use, and homicide. The longevity of people with HIV and AIDS was extended through new medicines. The city was cleaned up and parks improved. The boom times of the nineties created a new young, wealthy and ambitious population along with the movement towards fresher, organic foods this group demanded.

But even when all these factors that contribute to longevity are added up, they don’t explain why cancer rates among New York City dwellers have gone down by a third and cardiac arrests down by a fifth in the last 30 years, a pace that’s faster than the rest of the country. Commissioner of Public Health Thomas Frieden says that one of the causes is that New York City is a city of walkers, voted “Best Walking City” two years in a row by the American Podiatric Medical Association and Prevention magazine. New Yorkers not only walk, but they walk fast. The speed at which people walk is directly correlated to their longevity, according to a study among the elderly by Baltimore epidemiologist Eleanor Simonsick.

Driving in New York City is almost impossible, forcing people to walk, and using the subway gets them up and down stairs. The attractiveness of neighborhoods that have character, with older buildings and nearby

parks, serves as an incentive to get people walking outdoors. In 2005, a group of urban health academics in New York penned the expression “urban health advantage” in an article published in the Journal of Urban Health. The old saw about country life being healthier than city life has been turned on its head by the New York City experience, and a part of that turnaround can be attributed to walking. [From New York Magazine 8.13.07]

BY WENDY LANDMAN

Walking prescriptions

WalkBoston is partnering with the Uphams Corner Health Center, the Boston Public Health Commission and the Boston Police, Transportation and Public Works Departments on a program of “Walking Prescriptions for People and Neighborhoods.” With this program, health center clients are encouraged to walk. In addition, the program includes making physical improvements to the neighborhood and increasing police patrols along the routes used by walking groups. WalkBoston created the program idea and is supporting the effort with maps, walking audits, promotional materials, program strategy and coordination. The program is just getting under way, and we hope to report on progress in Fall ’08.

BY KARLA KARASH

Keeping your genes happy

Researchers have learned that humans have more than 140 genes whose role is to keep us healthy. But these genes are only active if stimulated by physical activity. If stimulated, these genes make proteins that benefit metabolism, muscle mass, fat deposition, blood vessels and immune function. Ronald Kahn, president of the Joslin Diabetes Center, says, “If you don’t exercise, you ‘dysregulate’ your genes.” If the genes are not active, the result can be type 2 diabetes, a skyrocketing epidemic worldwide. But modest exercise [30 minutes five days a week] is enough to stimulate our protective genes. And old-fashioned walking is a good way to get this exercise. [U.S. News and World Report, “We’re Born to Walk” by Bernadine Healy, 6.26.06.]

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WalkBoston encourages walking throughout Massachusetts for transportation, health and vibrant communities. Our education and advocacy programs give voice to citizens to make their communities walkable.

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party invite 3.6.08

Celebrate our 18th Annual Meeting

Thursday, March 6, 2008

RSVP: info@walkboston.org

4:00 | Downtown Development Walk

Led by BRA's John Palmieri, Exec. Dir., and Kairos Shen, Dir. of Planning.

Visit building sites currently under development. Learn how they will benefit and impact peds and shape the streetscape. South Station Tower/Hines; Hayward Place/MDA Partners; Paramount Center/Emerson College; Filene's [1 Franklin St.]/Gale-Vornado; 111 Federal St./Trans National Properties

Meet: South Station, front door, under the eagle

5:30 | Eat, Drink, Schmooze

WilmerHale, 60 State St., 26 fl.

Suggested donation: \$20

6:30 | Golden Shoe Awards

7:00 | Speaker, Jon Orcutt NYC DOT

Senior Policy Advisor

walk talk

"The sum of the whole is this: walk and be happy; walk and be healthy.

Charles Dickens

"I have two doctors—my left leg and my right leg." *George Trevelyan*

"A sound mind in a sound body, is a short but full description of a happy state in this world." *John Locke*

"The first wealth is health."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

in memoriam

Walking advocate killed by car

Bert Hirshberg, 90, who helped develop WalkBoston in its formative years, died on 2.1.08. Bert, who used a walker, was crossing Mass. Ave. near her home in a downpour when hit by a car. "Bert was terrific, had a lot of great ideas," said Dorothea Hass, co-founder of WalkBoston.

BY KARLA KARASH

walk away from cancer risk

World Cancer Research

The news on causes of cancer and ways to prevent cancer is often contradictory and confusing. Nonetheless, a recent report from the World Cancer Research Fund provides a pretty clear indication of the links between food, physical activity and cancer. This study involved nine research institutions and the examination of more than half a million publications. The results concluded that a third of cancers are caused by smoking, a third by poor food and exercise, and a third by other factors.

The surprise is that being even a bit overweight is a cancer risk. Indeed it seems that what we need to do to prevent cancer is the same as what we need to do to prevent metabolic syndrome [see below]. One theory is that metabolic syndrome involves the production of growth-stimulating molecules that help promote cancers. "Thus the first recommendation for reducing cancer risk is to be as lean as possible, and the second is to be moderately physically active, equivalent to brisk walking for at least 30 minutes per day."

Have breast cancer? Walk 3—5 hours a week.

Women with breast cancer who walk three to five hours a week are 50% less likely to die from the disease than inactive women with breast cancer. [Findings from the Nurses' Health Study that tracked nearly 3,000 women who were diagnosed with breast cancer between 1984 and 1998.]

thank you!

RACEWALKERS

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Gale International & Vornado Realty Trust

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Mass.Convention Center Auth.
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STROLLERS

Berkeley Investments
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Parsons Brinckerhoff
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Sovereign Bank
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Tufts Medical Center
UBS/Maurice Bradshaw
Vanasse Hangen Brustlin
Whole Foods Market
WilmerHale

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A Better City
Adaptive Environments
Architectural Heritage Found.
Arrowstreet
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Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
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BSC Group
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CBT Architects
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Cetrulo & Capone
Community Design Partnership
Copley Wolff Design Group
Crosby, Schlessinger & Smallridge
Crowe & Mulvey
Domenech Hicks & Krockmalnic
Environmental Business Council of New England
Fay, Spofford & Thorndike

Finegold, Alexander & Assoc.
Fort Point Associates
Friends of Post Office Square
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BY COREY FREEMAN

avoid dementia

A study of 2,257 physically capable men of Japanese ancestry between the ages of 71 and 93 has shown that increased amounts of walking is associated with a reduced risk of dementia. The Honolulu-Asia Aging Study gave exams from 1994-96 and 1997-99. Men with poor cognitive function were eliminated from the study. Diagnosis of dementia was based in part on the Cognitive Abilities Screening Instrument [CASI], a comprehensive measure of intellectual function. Men who walked the most had the highest CASI scores and lowest decline in physical activity. Men who walked the least [less than 0.25 miles/day] had 1.8 times the risk of dementia compared with those who walked more than 2 miles/day. [JAMA]

BY COREY FREEMAN

metabolic health

Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of symptoms including high blood pressure, sugar levels and cholesterol that can lead to heart disease, diabetes and stroke. A Duke University study found that walking just 30 minutes a day, six days a week, reduces the prevalence of metabolic syndrome [estimated to affect one quarter of all U.S. adults]. The good news is that energetic exercise such as daily jogging doesn't have significantly greater health benefits than a pleasant evening stroll after dinner. 41% percent of the 171 people in the study qualified as having syndrome symptoms at the start; at the end of eight months only 27% did. Over a decade, that would add up to 20 pounds of weight gained if a person weren't walking!