



Health Benefits

General Benefits

- There are significant benefits to physical activity including 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
 - Foster healthy muscles, bones and joints
 - Help maintain function and preserve independence in older adults
- Numerous studies have shown that people will become more physically active in response to the creation of or improved access to places for physical activity. Median estimates suggest that there can be a 25% increase in the percent of persons who exercise at least 3 times a week.
- 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.
- Recent studies have produced evidence suggesting people benefit so much from contact with nature that land conservation can now be viewed as a public health strategy.
- Researchers in England and Sweden have found that joggers who exercise in natural green settings feel more restored and less anxious than people who burn the same calories in gyms. Research is continuing into "green exercise."
- A study in the UK showed that access to green spaces has an independently beneficial impact on health and health-related behavior which counteracts the effects of poverty and inner-city deprivation. It was systematically shown that the health gap between rich and poor can be halved with the help of green spaces. (Glasgow University and University of St. Andrews, 2008)
- A NC State study in Cary, NC found that 72% of respondents indicated it was likely a potential trail would provide a place for them to exercise and 57% said they likely would exercise more if the trail were created.

- People who reported using trails at least once a week were twice as likely to meet physical activity recommendations than people who rarely used them. (American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2006)
- The CDC estimates that a difference of 100 calories of exercise per person per day, the equivalent of 20 minutes of walking, could eliminate the obesity epidemic we are not experiencing.

Cost Benefits

- A 2004 study (Journal: Health Promotion Practice) concluded that for every dollar spent on trails nearly three dollars of public health benefits are produced.
- Two nationwide surveys in Holland showed that people who lived close to green space reported significantly better health than those without such access, after researchers controlled for socioeconomic status, age and other factors. (Howard Frumkin, CDC, and Richard Louv)
- Trust for American Health in “Prevention for a Healthier America” found that programs encouraging physical activity and healthy eating and discouraging smoking were a better investment than those concentrating on treatment. “What’s been interesting is that if you make it easier for people to make better choices, they actually do.” (2008)
- Trails and greenways offer cost-effective places to exercise as opposed to indoor gyms and health clubs.

Older Adults

- Americans aged 65 and older are the least active group in the US. Research has shown that seniors who have healthy lifestyles that include regular exercise reduce their risk for chronic diseases and have half the rate of disability of those who do not.
- Regular exercise can help prevent many of the conditions that frequently lead to emergency room visits such as cardiovascular problems and falls from lack of balance or weak bones.
- Researchers at San Diego State University completed a 23-year study on middle-age men. One group exercised regularly; the other group exercised for 5 years and then stopped.
 - Those who hadn’t exercised had lost 41 % of the maximal aerobic power while those who exercised lost 13 %.
 - None of the men in the exercise group developed high blood pressure and 60 % of the men who didn’t exercise developed it.
- A study in Italy of exercise habits of people over 65 found that they most-frequent walkers had a 27% lower risk for developing vascular dementia than those people who walked the least. (Neurology, 2007) The Annals of Internal Medicine reported as well that regular walkers have lower dementia risk.

Children

- Two studies show that the prevalence of overweight children and adolescents has increased dramatically. The prevalence of children ages 6-11 has increased from 4% in the 1960's to 19% in 2003/4. Overweight adolescents ages 12-19 have increased from 4.5% to 17.5% in the same time period.
- Diseases that used to be considered adult illnesses like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure are becoming increasingly common in children. If the current obesity epidemic is not reversed, the current generation may be the first in American history to live sicker and die younger than their parents' generation. (Dr. James Marks, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)
- Play in natural settings offer special benefits to children: it is an essential component of child development: intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and physical.
- Children with ADD have fewer symptoms and enhanced ability to focus. (Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods)

Obesity

- Despite increased attention to the obesity epidemic, obesity is continuing to grow in the US. The number of states with obesity rates greater than 25% has more than double in just two years. The South is the locus of the problem. (Trust for America's Health, 2007)
- A 2001 "call to action" by the Surgeon General highlighted an alarming trend: Overweight and obesity may soon cause as much preventable disease and death as cigarette smoking.