

# HIKING TRAILS IN AMERICA

## *Pathways to Health*

AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY | MAY 2016





# WHAT WE SHOULD DO

We **know** what we must do to live healthy, productive, and fulfilling lives.



OR



AND



**2 hours and 30 minutes**

of moderate-intensity aerobic activity such as brisk walking

**EACH WEEK**

**1 hour and 15 minutes**

of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity such as hiking uphill or with a weighted pack

**EACH WEEK**

**just 10 minutes**

of muscle-strengthening activities

**2 OR MORE DAYS  
A WEEK.\***





# WHAT WE ACTUALLY DO

Yet most Americans are still not getting sufficient physical activity

**only 1 in 5**

American adults meet the CDC's physical activity guidelines.<sup>†</sup>



# WHAT IS AT STAKE

We can do better! Walking is our best medicine. Just step outside your front door, find a trail, and take a hike.

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy's 2015 *Call to Action* to promote walking has highlighted that brisk walking (or hiking) can do wonders for our health.

According to the Mayo Clinic, brisk walking or hiking can help:



prevent or manage  
**heart disease & high blood pressure**



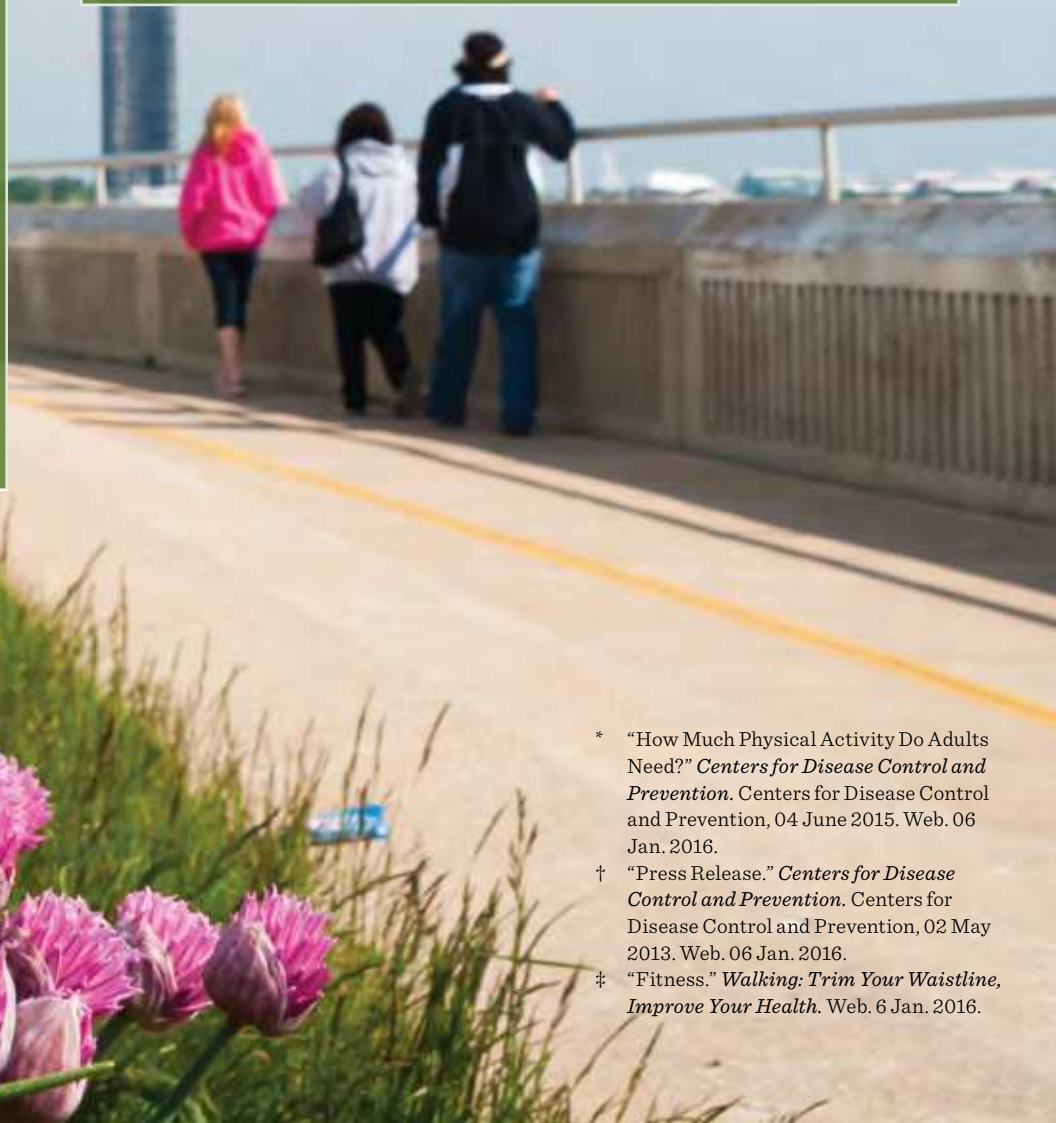
achieve a  
**healthy weight**



prevent and manage  
**type 2 diabetes**



improve  
**mental health<sup>‡</sup>**

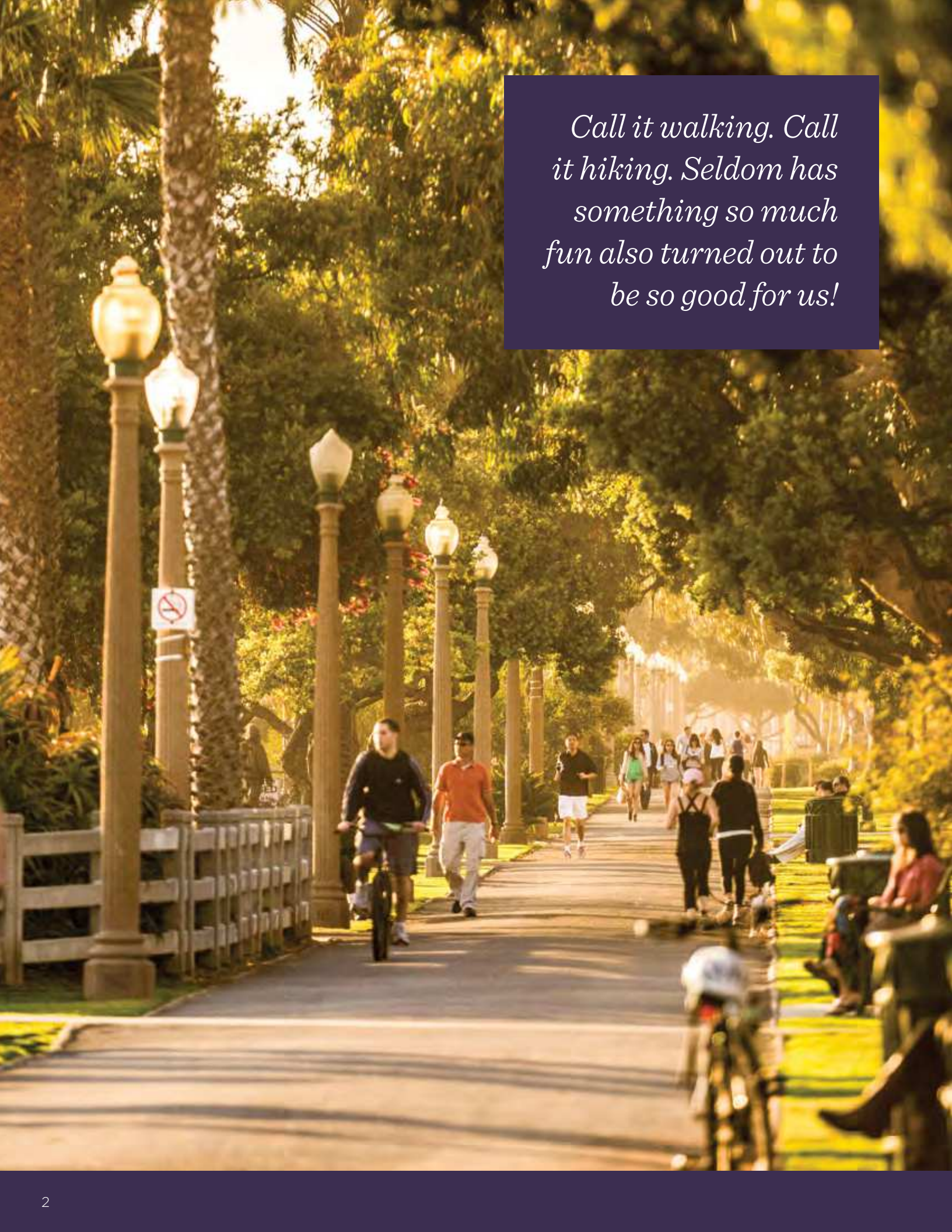


\* "How Much Physical Activity Do Adults Need?" *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 04 June 2015. Web. 06 Jan. 2016.

† "Press Release." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 02 May 2013. Web. 06 Jan. 2016.

‡ "Fitness." *Walking: Trim Your Waistline, Improve Your Health*. Web. 6 Jan. 2016.





*Call it walking. Call it hiking. Seldom has something so much fun also turned out to be so good for us!*

# PATHWAYS TO HEALTH

**When it comes to health and fitness, most of us know we can and should do better.** We always say that health is more important than money, yet our actions all too often fail to reflect that. We even sometimes set ourselves up with lofty health and fitness goals in the new year and then feel let down when real life keeps us from going to the gym or joining friends for a run.

But it doesn't have to be like that.

Walking is the key to numerous health benefits that are life-changing. Benefits such as a healthy body weight, lower blood pressure, and even an improved mental outlook.

But walking sounds so... pedestrian.

So American Hiking Society encourages walkers and would-be-walkers to mix it up a little and go for a hike—even an urban hike!

With numerous trails in and near urban and suburban centers, getting out on the trail has never been easier. Whether the trail is a converted railway line, a dirt path in the park, or a marked route among buildings

and other community features, hiking close to home is an easy way to “up” the fun level of getting and staying fit.

While we don't want to get hung up on terminology, sometimes people wonder: just what is the difference between hiking and walking anyway? American Hiking Society notes that characteristics of hiking include walking recreationally and walking in a natural environment (trees and plants in the city count!). While many trails are dirt, many Americans also hike on paved trails. According to Gregory Miller, president of American Hiking Society, if you're walking for fun or fitness, watching the leaves change on the trees, maybe noticing the birds among the plants, you're hiking—no matter where that hike is taking place. Miller continues, **“Just get up and walk. Find a nearby trail and take a hike, experience the natural wonders of a city park or backcountry wilderness.”**

Call it walking. Call it hiking. Seldom has something so much fun also turned out to be so good for us!

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## Hiking—Healthcare in High Tops

Like much of the world, America today faces myriad health concerns. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 35% (79 million) adults in America are obese.<sup>1</sup> This obesity leads to health issues such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke, among others. Additionally, millions of Americans are challenged with health issues such as arthritis, high blood pressure, and other conditions that negatively impact their quality of life.

These health issues affect peoples' ability to enjoy time with their families and friends, get involved in their communities, and live life to the fullest. Additionally, chronic health issues and obesity affect more than just those who suffer with them: they affect their employers and the US economy as well. In 2011, employees who were overweight or obese and have other chronic health conditions cost employers more than \$153 billion in lost productivity.<sup>2</sup>

In our search for solutions we pay millions of dollars for research, spend years studying complex human behaviors, and attempt to discern even the slightest of environmental influences that could affect a health issue.

**While all this is certainly necessary, sometimes the solution we've been searching for has been in front of us all along.**

**Something as simple as walking.**



While the health problems America faces can seem daunting, one facet of the solution is incredibly simple: increasing physical activity such as walking and hiking.

It may seem too easy to be true, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have demonstrated that just 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity such as brisk walking or hiking, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity activity such as hiking uphill or with a heavy backpack, provide significant health benefits such as:

- ▶ Lower risk of:
  - early death
  - heart disease and stroke
  - high blood pressure
  - type 2 diabetes
  - colon and breast cancer
- ▶ Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight
- ▶ Improved cardiorespiratory fitness
- ▶ Improved bone health
- ▶ Reduced depression<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, while people who suffer from arthritis may have difficulty being physically active, walking and hiking can potentially reduce joint pain and improve function for many adults with arthritis.<sup>4</sup>

## HEALTH ISSUE DIABETES



Diabetes is brought about by problems with insulin levels and yields higher, unhealthy levels of blood sugar. The two most common types of diabetes are type 1 and type 2. Most U.S. adults who have diabetes (90%-95% of adults who have diabetes), have type 2. Type 2 usually occurs in adults and is associated with several risk factors, among them being obesity and physical inactivity.<sup>5</sup>

- ▶ More than 29 million Americans of all ages (more than 9% of the US population) suffered from diabetes (types 1 and 2) in 2012.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Diabetes can result in other health issues such as stroke, kidney failure, and heart disease.<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ In 2012, indirect costs such as disability and work loss totaled \$69 billion in the U.S.<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ In 2010 diabetes was the 7th leading cause of death in the U.S.<sup>9</sup>

## HEALTH ISSUE OBESITY



In today's American society, it can be all too easy for people to be obese. While this can take a toll on self-esteem, it also leads to many of the health conditions discussed elsewhere in this report, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease, as well as certain types of cancer and high blood pressure.<sup>10</sup>

- ▶ In 2011-2012, in the U.S., 17% of children aged 2-19 and 35% of adults 20 and older, suffered from obesity.<sup>11</sup>
- ▶ In the U.S., the healthcare costs of obesity were estimated to be \$147 billion in 2008 dollars.<sup>12</sup>
- ▶ Annual economic costs related to obesity in the U.S. exceeds \$215 billion.<sup>13</sup>



## Walking & Hiking— Fun with Benefits

In reviewing a study by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Life Science Division in Berkeley, CA, the American Heart Association reveals that walking can lower a person's risk of diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol as much as running does.<sup>14</sup> That's right—**for many of these common health ailments, walking and hiking can be as effective as running.**

This is great news for people who either don't enjoy running or who are unable to run. The findings are also welcomed by those who enjoy a brisk walk simply as a recreational activity. These findings confirm that getting fit and healthy doesn't have to be about expensive workout clothes or setting aside what little free time most people have to dedicate it to running or a trip to the gym—just go outside and enjoy a nice walk.

Combining healthy exercise with something a person enjoys doing is not only convenient, but also makes it more likely that the individual will stick

### HEALTH ISSUE HEART DISEASE



In the U.S., coronary artery disease is the most common form of heart disease.<sup>15</sup> Heart attacks and strokes are both caused by coronary artery disease, particularly by the buildup of plaque in the walls of arteries. Exercise such as hiking can help to prevent this disease.

- ▶ Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the US, killing more than 800,000 Americans each year.<sup>16</sup>
- ▶ In 2012, more than 26 million American adults were diagnosed with heart disease. That is more than 11% of the total US adult population.<sup>17</sup>
- ▶ Health care costs and lost productivity due to heart disease and stroke was estimated to be \$320 billion in 2011.<sup>18</sup>

with it. A Portuguese study published in 2011 was able to draw a direct correlation between the enjoyment of a fitness activity and the likelihood of a participant continuing to pursue it.<sup>19</sup>

So what does this mean for hiking, whether it's taking place on a city trail or in the backcountry? Simply that when people hike, they might enjoy the health benefits of hiking, but the fact that it's an enjoyable recreational activity is what keeps them coming back and that consistency is what sets them up for a lifetime of physical fitness.

## The Nature Connection

American Hiking Society firmly believes that hiking can be done in urban as well as rural areas, but emphasizes that to maximize health benefits there should be a connection to nature on urban hikes. Often people do not associate “nature” with urban environments, but urban planners are increasingly including trails and green spaces in cities and suburbs, making them part of the public health





## HEALTH ISSUE MENTAL HEALTH



When people suffer from mental health issues, it frequently goes unnoticed and underreported. But good mental health is crucial to overall health and well-being. Those too depressed to get moving are not likely to participate in physical activities that would help prevent or alleviate physical ailments.

- ▶ Approximately 16 million adults in America had at least one major depressive episode in 2012.<sup>20</sup>
- ▶ In 2014, almost 3 million adolescents in the U.S. had a major depressive episode<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ In the U.S., lost work days due to those suffering from depression cost approximately \$17 to \$44 billion.<sup>22</sup>

infrastructure. Reasons for the inclusion of trails in urban areas include their health and recreational benefits as well as the positive impact on real estate values near trails.<sup>23</sup>

Trails, with even a few trees or a little greenery around them, have in fact been demonstrated to bestow numerous mental health benefits. Specifically, time spent walking in nature has been associated with reducing depression<sup>24</sup> as well as with improvements in memory and a reduction in anxiety.<sup>25</sup>

Time spent in natural settings has also been demonstrated to alleviate symptoms in children with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.<sup>26</sup> One study indicated that the time children spent in outdoor environments did not have to be in what one may call “deep nature,” but simply in relatively natural outdoor settings.<sup>27</sup>

Such findings indicate that one need not travel to a remote national park to reap the benefits associated with being in nature, but rather that trails such as paved rail trails with foliage along one or both sides may be sufficient.

## HEALTH ISSUE ARTHRITIS

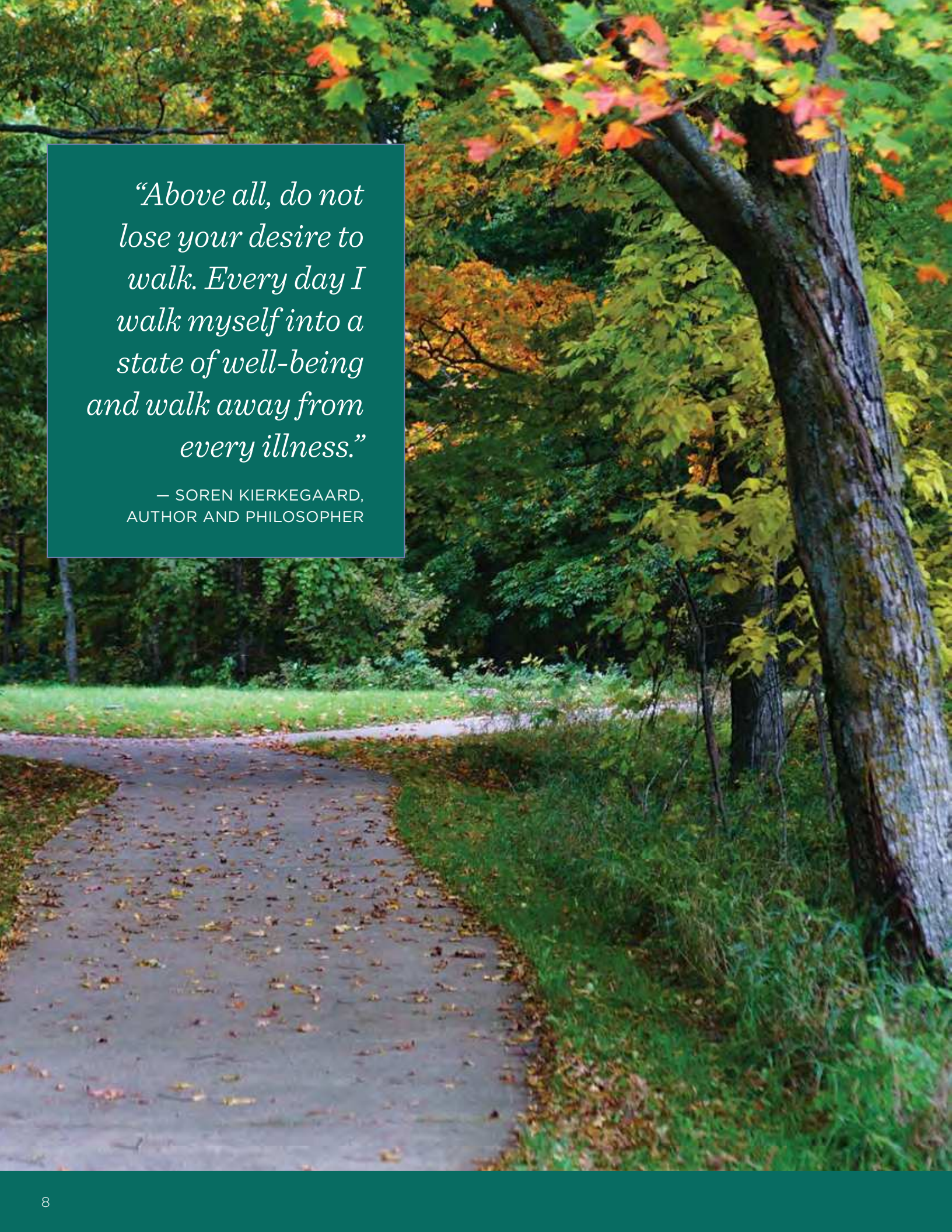


Arthritis, rather than being one specific disease, is actually a general term for any one of many rheumatic diseases that affect the joints and other tissues. Most types of arthritis involve joint pain and stiffness. According to the CDC, physical activity can help alleviate the pain as well as improve function for most people with arthritis.<sup>28</sup>

- ▶ Approximately 52 million U.S. adults, or 1 out of 5, have arthritis.<sup>29</sup>
- ▶ In the U.S., medical costs and lost earnings due to arthritis and related conditions were \$128 billion in 2003.<sup>30</sup>
- ▶ US adults of working age who have arthritis are less likely to be employed than those without the disease.<sup>31</sup>







*“Above all, do not  
lose your desire to  
walk. Every day I  
walk myself into a  
state of well-being  
and walk away from  
every illness.”*

— SOREN KIERKEGAARD,  
AUTHOR AND PHILOSOPHER



## Trails Put All Americans on the Path to Good Health

Hiking and walking are easily done by people of just about all levels of physical fitness and across the economic spectrum. Walking is fundamentally human. By ensuring that trails are available and accessible to the American public, especially near where they live, an array of health and other benefits may be bestowed on local communities. Unlike some other facilities and activities, trails are unique in being so accessible to most people. Even those with limited mobility or who use a wheelchair can enjoy a paved trail and reap the many benefits trails have to offer.

Trails make it easy for people to get outdoors as well as to enjoy some exercise and recreation at almost any existing fitness level. One need not already be an athlete to begin hiking. And other than a good pair of shoes,

no special equipment is required and no gym membership must be purchased. An additional benefit is that for those who feel self-conscious exercising in front of others, as beginners and many others often do, there is little fear of judgment when one is simply outdoors hiking or walking.

A person's ability to set their own pace while hiking is also helpful to those seeking to improve their health. Hiking is not a race. A person doesn't need to maintain a certain speed or reach a particular destination. For those who desire it, a place to sit and rest can frequently be found along trails. When a person seeks a more challenging hike, however, that can be done simply by increasing one's pace, finding a hilly trail, or carrying a backpack with some light weight in it—an activity known as rucking.

Whether it's a hike in the park or a walk in the woods, the choice is up to the participant—but only if trails are available and accessible.

### HEALTH ISSUE BONE DENSITY/ OSTEOPOROSIS



Bone density is important for both women and men. Bone is a living tissue and strong bones help prevent fractures and breaks, especially as people age. Osteoporosis, a disease where bone density is greatly reduced, makes a person more susceptible to bone fractures.<sup>32</sup>

- ▶ Approximately 54 million Americans have osteoporosis and low bone mass.<sup>33</sup>
- ▶ The cost, nationally, attributed to broken bones due to osteoporosis is \$19 billion.<sup>34</sup>
- ▶ Weight-bearing physical activity such as hiking and walking improves bone health.<sup>35</sup>





## Programs That Get America Moving

Sometimes even the most well-intentioned of us need some encouragement—a little nudge perhaps—to lead healthier lives. Fortunately, there are many wonderful programs that are successfully engaging Americans in the pursuit of becoming healthier by walking in the great outdoors. Some

of these programs provide information and encouragement while others are participatory, boots-on-the-trail programs, organizing outings for those they seek to serve so that they may gain the benefits that come from this healthy outdoor pursuit.

Medical professionals, new moms, combat veterans, and many more are encouraging and enabling Americans to begin hiking and reap its numerous therapeutic benefits. Here, we are delighted to highlight several organizations and programs that are at the leading edge of these efforts.





# Healthy Parks Healthy People

What do an “enchanted dunes and cranberry bog walk” at Cape Cod National Seashore, a “sunset stroll” at White Sands National Monument, and a “mindful walk, yoga, and tai chi” on the National Mall and Memorial Parks all have in common? They are all fun and engaging ways the National Park Service is encouraging the American public to enjoy a healthy lifestyle, as part of its Healthy Parks Healthy People program.

**Healthy Parks Healthy People is a program of the National Park Service with the goal of reframing the role of parks and public lands as a powerful health promotion strategy, and bringing about lasting change in Americans’ lifestyle choices and their relationship with parks and the great outdoors.**

As the National Park Service celebrates its Centennial in 2016, *Healthy Parks Healthy People* is helping to expand the relevancy and significance of parks and programs as “go-to resources for healthy living.” Parks are ideal

places for people to learn about and practice healthy lifestyles, connect with nature and history, and relax in a setting removed from the distractions of daily life. Park settings provide recreational experiences such as walking, hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, paddling, and swimming that promote personal health and well-being. Further, providing access to parks can address the disproportionate burden of health issues among vulnerable populations (youth, seniors, veterans), and among populations who tend to use parks infrequently (minorities, low income residents, disabled).

Although *Healthy Parks Healthy People* is based within the National Park Service, the program works with national, state, and local parks, as well as business innovators, healthcare leaders, and advocacy organizations to foster and build upon the role that parks play in the health of our society.

Since the inception of *Healthy Parks Healthy People* in 2011, there are more than 400



park-based health promotion projects documented in national parks, with half of them in collaboration with health partners to encourage walking and hiking in the parks through a myriad of programs—from hiking challenges such as “Get your Tail on the Trail” at the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor to hiking clubs at Booker T. Washington National Monument and Saguaro National Park, as well as Walk with a Doc programs at Cuyahoga Valley National Park and George Washington Carver National Monument.





## Warrior Hike—Walking Off the War

Historically, military units would experience a lengthy journey home after fighting a campaign abroad. During this journey home, warriors would process and come to terms with their wartime experiences. But in today's age of modern transportation, military personnel can find themselves home within a few days of serving in a combat zone.

In 1948, combat veteran Earl Shaffer told a friend he was going to “walk off the war” to work out the sights, sounds, and losses of World War II. Four months later, Shaffer became the first person to hike the entire length of the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine.

In 2012, after returning home from three combat deployments as a US Marine to Iraq and Afghanistan, Sean Gobin hiked all 2,185 miles of the Appalachian Trail. **Recognizing the therapeutic effects of long distance hiking, Gobin founded Warrior Hike (later expanded to Warrior Expeditions) which is designed to support veterans transitioning**



**from their military service by participating in long distance outdoor expeditions.**

Veterans participating in Warrior Expeditions programs receive various forms of support during and after their journey. First, veterans receive the necessary equipment and supplies required to complete a long distance outdoor expedition. Next, Warrior Expeditions coordinates community support in the forms of transportation, food, and lodging from veteran and community organizations located along the route. Lastly, Warrior Expeditions assists veterans with job placement opportunities at the completion of their journey

with the program's numerous sponsors and partners.

Veterans participating in a long distance outdoor expedition have the opportunity to decompress from their military service and come to terms with their wartime experiences. Veterans experience their journey with the camaraderie of other veterans who understand the challenges of transitioning from military service to civilian life. Interaction with communities along the way facilitates veterans' reintegration into society, restores their faith in humanity, and builds a network of life-long friendships.



## Park Prescriptions

ParkRx (Park Prescriptions) is one initiative that is gaining particular prominence as a promising practice for expansion nationally, and Dr. Robert Zarr, a pediatrician based at Unity Health Care, Inc. in Washington, DC, has been appointed to serve as the National Park Service's Park Rx Advisor.

**ParkRx programs are designed by parks and public land agencies, healthcare providers, and community partners in collaboration to utilize parks, trails, and open space for the purpose of improving individual and community health.**

The programs are designed to meet local community needs, with one common goal in mind—to improve the health and well-being of area residents through regular use and enjoyment of parks.

ParkRx has grown out of a conceptual phase into a period of rapid implementation. Today, 32 Park Prescription programs

have been inventoried across the country, including 14 Park Prescription efforts in national parks. The National ParkRx Initiative partners build on early successes and lessons learned that can contribute to building a community of practice to support broader park and community-based application of Park Prescriptions nationally.

The National Park Service, National Recreation and Park Association, and the Institute at the Golden Gate, serve as co-leaders and conveners of the National ParkRx Initiative. The Initiative has launched a National ParkRx website (ParkRx.org), maintained by the Institute at the Golden Gate, in collaboration with experts from across the country to provide resources, tools, and case studies from park prescriptions to help grow the movement more broadly.

In addition, the National Park Service organized National Park Rx Day on April 24, 2016. With input from the National



*“Among the community of medical and public health practitioners across our country, ParkRx is finally being recognized as an essential tool to prevent and treat chronic disease, as well as promote overall well-being.”*

— DR. ROBERT ZARR,  
NPS PARK RX ADVISOR

ParkRx Initiative and the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, Park Rx Day will bring national attention to this critical initiative and build on the U.S. Surgeon General's call to action to promote walking and walkable communities and to provide citizens with parks and green spaces to promote public health.





## Hike it Baby

When Hike it Baby first began it was a simple attempt to get more families to get together with newborns and toddlers and get outside and onto trails. The founder, Shanti Hodges, came up with the idea after looking online for a group to join with her newborn son and found nothing. So she thought if she built a way to connect with other families, people would come hike with her. She started with a rudimentary website and a Facebook group and within two years it blossomed into a huge network of almost 100,000 families in over 200 cities across North America. The groups form in city after city in what are now called Hike it Baby “branches,” in a network that spreads like an ever-growing tree from city to city.

**Hike it Baby provides a safe and supported way for parents to get out with little ones.** There are more than 2,000 volunteer-led hikes each month and numerous gatherings in parks and nature centers. According to Hodges, the reason for



the rapid growth of Hike it Baby can likely be attributed to the guidelines the group adheres to: leave no family behind, strong community connections, no judgment, raising a generation to love the outdoors, respect nature, and inspiring wellness as a daily habit.

With simple practices such as always having a lead and a caboose to make sure the group stays together and a rating system for hikes, Hike it Baby is a very user-friendly family group. People also join Hike it Baby because “hike” is a loose term. Walking on trails, stroller hikes, and urban walks: all count as “hikes” to the organization. The goal is the journey and not the destination. Creating a daily habit to get into nature through Challenges and community support, as well

as encouraging families to get out in a way that works for their lifestyle and slowly, is key to their growth and success. Moving a family from a walk to a trail when the family feels ready makes it easy for everyone to join with a child from a few weeks old to elementary school age.

Now incorporated as a non-profit organization, Hike it Baby is run almost entirely by passionate volunteers who believe that if you get your family out even once a week into nature, the effect on your life and your community will be significant. Hike it Baby partners with longstanding organizations such as American Hiking Society because working together we all can get more Americans outdoors and protecting our parks and open spaces.



## Step it Up!

As “America’s doctor,” the Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy, is responsible for communicating the best available scientific information to the American public to help improve personal and public health. Dr. Murthy is a champion for the art of healing and improving community health and, as such, was at the forefront of the publication of, *Step It Up! The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities*, in the fall of 2015. **The Call to Action not only promotes walking as one of the best ways to improve public health, but also seeks to make walking more accessible through good community design, public policy, and cooperation among partners.**

In making the call to action, the report cited the scope of the problem, including:

- ▶ In 2013, 3 of every 10 U.S. adults were inactive during their leisure time,



and only 50% of them reported physical activity at levels consistent with the Surgeon General’s guidelines for aerobic physical activity.

- ▶ Physical inactivity is unhealthy and increases as we get older: 35% aged 65–74 years, 47% aged 75–84 years, and 64% of those over 85 years were inactive.
- ▶ Only 27% of high school students met physical activity levels of 60 minutes/day for that age group. Healthy physical development for children of all ages depends on aerobic exercise that strengthens muscles and bones.<sup>36</sup>

Humans were born to walk, that’s what we are supposed to do, and utilizing Dr. Murthy’s *Call to Action*, America can reclaim walking as our most common and important physical activity. The *Call to Action* seeks to increase walking across the United States by calling for improved access to safe and convenient places (and trails) to walk and wheelchair roll, as well as for a culture that supports these activities for people of all ages and abilities. It seeks to do this through innovative community strategies that can be implemented where people live, learn, work, and play.





*“Walking is man’s  
best medicine.”*

— HIPPOCRATES





# Connecting People to Trails

## Increasing Public Awareness of Trails in Their Community

When some Americans think of trails they may think of rugged dirt paths in faraway parks and forests. Or perhaps they think of trails such as the Appalachian Trail or even the Pacific Crest Trail which was made famous in a recent best-selling book. While these well-known trails are certainly iconic and deservedly well-loved, **trails—both paved and unpaved—frequently exist much closer to home than people realize.**

With nearly 200,000 linear miles of trails on federal lands, more than 42,000 miles of trails on state lands, and thousands more miles on county and locally-owned lands, trails crisscross our nation and touch most communities.<sup>37</sup> Whether it's a paved "rail trail" weaving

through neighborhoods in urban downtowns such as Chicago or a natural surface trail that provides an amazing back-to-nature experience right in our nation's capital, trails are in the vast majority of cities as well as on mountaintops.

Unfortunately, many Americans are unaware of these public trails that are theirs to use and enjoy. Not showing up on most road maps, nonexistent or insufficient signage, and a general lack of publicity about these trails hinder public usage of a resource that would not only enhance their health but their overall quality of life.

**Trail administrators and managers as well as federal and state highway officials are encouraged to increase road signage near trails,** include them on state and county maps, and provide clearly marked and inviting entrances to trails (trailheads).

Additionally, local trail organizations, volunteers, metropolitan planning organizations, and others should be encouraged to host National Trails Day® events. In an effort to connect people with their local trails, American Hiking Society organizes National Trails Day® each year on the first Saturday of June. On this day parks, hiking clubs, and others across the nation host events such as hikes, bike rides, and trail clean-ups that are open to all. American Hiking Society, using its national reach, then promotes these events, allowing people to find an event near them that piques their interest. A local expert to introduce them to the trail, along with fun activities, is sometimes just the thing to familiarize the public with their local trails.





PHOTO BY MARK GOING

# Addressing Safety Concerns

Whether leading to a faraway mountain peak or travelling through a bustling urban area, trails must be maintained and be safe places for the public to enjoy. This is essential in order for trails to truly be the public recreation and fitness resource that they are intended to be.

## URBAN TRAILS

Trail maintenance (cutting back vegetation, maintaining the trail surface, etc.) and cleanliness is important to any trail but is especially important to trails that get high usage. A trail that feels uncared for or is littered with trash sends a message that it may not be a safe community trail. **Regular maintenance and upkeep by trail managers**

**as well as volunteers and “Friends of” groups can help ensure trails not only feel safe but are safe.**

If a community trail doesn't already have a dedicated group of volunteers to help care for it, the trail manager should foster one's creation. Local “ownership” and pride in a trail goes a long way towards keeping it well-maintained, utilized, and an emblem of local pride.

## BACKCOUNTRY TRAILS

In the backcountry, distances between trail junctions and access points are often much longer than in urban and suburban areas. Hikers, especially those unacquainted with a particular trail, may feel more at ease having detailed information about the trail, what to expect, and an understanding of distances.

**Frequent blazing or signage, even between junctions and turns, helps to keep hikers on the right path and also reassures them along the way.**

Providing information at the trail head and online is key to ensuring that hikers have an idea of what they can expect to encounter on their backcountry hike.

Additionally, many backcountry hiking trips involve travelling to areas where hikers may not be familiar with local issues such as bear activity, flash flooding, and other safety concerns. Whether it's learning to identify plants such as poison ivy or knowing the difference between a venomous and non-venomous snake, education is crucial to ensuring that hikers entering the backcountry feel safe and are prepared to handle various safety issues that may arise.







# Welcoming Americans of All Abilities

While hiking can sometimes include hauling a pack with 40 pounds of gear up a steep mountain trail, it is far more frequently simply a walk—or roll—with nature in the great outdoors on a trail that’s not all that distant from our homes.

Many people may at first think of hiking as something that is just too rugged for them, but the fact is that **it’s the perfect activity whether a person is seeking to get fit after a period of inactivity or boost their fitness and take it to the next level.** It’s not gear-intensive, is open to all ages, and people at all levels of fitness can participate. Even those who

use a wheelchair can enjoy a roll with nature on paved rail trails as well as on some unpaved trails.

Whether a person has been physically inactive for a long period, has physical limitations, or simply doesn’t consider themselves “outdoorsy,” there’s no reason they should feel daunted about getting out on the trail.

Together, nongovernmental organizations and health and public land agencies can encourage those who don’t think trails are for them due to physical limitations to get outdoors and on the trail for fun and recreation. Simply by providing some basic information to assist in locating nearby trails that are easy to walk or roll on (level, paved or smooth unpaved, have places to rest) as well as trail tips

and other information, these **organizations can empower potential trail users to take the first steps toward improved health and also ensure they feel valued as genuine members of the trails community.**

Additionally, organizations, health leaders, and federal agencies could also facilitate “beginner” trail hikes as well as hikes geared towards those who use wheelchairs, are vision-impaired, or may otherwise feel disenfranchised from the trails community. Hosting such hiking events geared to new users during national events such as National Trails Day® and National Public Lands Day would allow them to reach new users utilizing the existing national public outreach and awareness campaigns these days already employ.





# CALLS TO ACTION

## 1 Maintain funding that supports trails and the public lands around them

We know that people prefer to walk where it's pleasant to do so and trails provide just such opportunities. Ensuring that there are plentiful trails near where people live encourages healthy lifestyles and an improved quality of life.

While trails don't require intensive support or infrastructure, they do require on-going maintenance and, for new trail segments, construction costs. **While volunteers and public donations do much to help offset this (the Partnership for the National**

**Trails System reported \$24.8 million in volunteer time donated on just the National Scenic and Historic Trails in 2015<sup>38</sup>), the government has a vital role to play as well.**

In partnership with America's volunteer trail stewards, adequate government funding of the land management agencies, including the National Park Service, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management, is critical to ensuring public access to an accessible and sustainable American trails system.

One primary source of funding for protecting the public lands through which many trails travel is the Land and Water

Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF is a critical program for conserving public landscapes: sometimes through enabling the outright purchase of land and sometimes through easements that allow a trail corridor to be established on private land. Funds for LWCF do not come from taxpayer dollars, but from the revenues collected by the federal government from offshore oil and gas leases. The idea behind the program's creation was to use a portion of the income from the depletion of one public resource to conserve another public resource.

Despite the fact that "full funding" for LWCF was established by Congress to be





\$900 million annually, sadly this has seldom been realized.

## ACTIONS

► **Congress should permanently reauthorize and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund.**

► **Congress should adequately fund America's land management agencies** through the regular appropriations process for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture.

## 2 Complete and connect America's trails

America has an extensive trails system, some of which have been designated by Congress as National Scenic Trails or National Historic Trails, and are a part of the National Trails System. Of the 11 National Scenic Trails created by Congress, however, more than half of them still have significant gaps.<sup>39</sup> Such gaps in these trails stifle Congress's original vision of the trails they authorized, prevent hikers and other trail users from enjoying long-distance adventures, and for those Americans who live near the gaps, prevent that close-to-home hiking experience and fitness opportunity.

Additionally, numerous state and local trails would also benefit from either completion or connecting them to form a cohesive network for trail users. While a trail that allows people to exercise and experience the outdoors is worthy in its own right, trails that connect to each other as well as to various neighborhoods and destinations such as schools, libraries, shopping districts, and tourism destinations, are what create truly vibrant and well-loved trails systems.

## ACTIONS

► **Congress should pass the North Country Trails Route Adjustment Act** which would finally allow this great northern trail to be completed.

► Metropolitan Planning Organizations, county governments, trails advisory councils, and other local planners should **focus on creating not just trails, but trails systems, to better serve their local constituents.**

► **Congress should pass the Complete America's Great Trails Act** which would provide a tax credit for conservation easements along National Scenic Trails.

► **Congress should permanently reauthorize and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund.**

## 3 Create more trails in urban and suburban areas

If we as a nation are to create an environment and culture where improving health and fitness is simple, accessible, and encouraged, then creating a public health infrastructure that includes trails is a necessity.

In surveying American Hiking Society members across a span of years, analysis has revealed that even people who self-identify as hikers are, in recent years, choosing to hike closer to home. Time constraints, convenience, and competing priorities simply make this a more attractive option to many Americans, particularly for routine outings.

Coupling such information with the fact that the most recent US census revealed that 80.7% of the US population live in urban areas<sup>40</sup> and it becomes self-evident that **an increase in the number of trails in and near America's population centers is clearly warranted.** Close-to-home trails would provide more convenient and more accessible







resources for those seeking to maintain or improve their fitness or engage in healthy recreation such as hiking and walking.

## ACTIONS

- ▶ **State governments should be encouraged to strategically and fully utilize Recreational Trails Program funding.**
- ▶ Citizens' groups, park managers, metropolitan planning organizations, and state bicycle/pedestrian coordinators should be **encouraged to work collaboratively to capitalize on opportunities to create and connect trails in urban and suburban areas.**

- ▶ As lands become available that fit into a locale's trail management strategy, options should be explored to purchase the lands from willing sellers or obtain easements. **Many urban areas have created wonderful trails from lands that would otherwise be unused or abandoned.**

## 4 Promote urban/suburban hiking for fitness and fun

When people think of fitness many of them think of going to the gym, hypercompetitive fitness regimens, and, in general, think of it as something to do—not to enjoy. Leaders in the hiking, health, fitness, and

walking communities have an opportunity to change this way of thinking with marketing messages that share information about getting fit as a byproduct of having fun; of getting fit on a trail at one's own pace, whether it's 1 mile per hour or 4 miles per hour.

In 2015 the Surgeon General released *Step It Up! The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities*. The Call to Action called for "improved access to safe and convenient places to walk and wheelchair roll, as well as for a culture that supports these activities for people of all ages and abilities."<sup>41</sup>

Echoing that message, *Let's Move! Outside!*, an offshoot of



First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* campaign to end childhood obesity, has the goal of getting "kids active so they see the physical activity they need not a chore but as a fun way to explore our country."<sup>42</sup>

**Creating unified messaging for, and sharing messaging among, diverse advocates for health, outdoor recreation, fitness, and active transportation can help reach new audiences** and create a national renaissance of hiking and walking, getting Americans on the path towards better health.

## ACTIONS

- ▶ **Encourage shared messaging** among diverse groups such as hiking organizations, the medical community, federal, state, and local government agencies, and others so that messaging is consistent and reaches a broad and diverse audience.
- ▶ **Encourage trail managers, hiking clubs, and others to host National Trails Day, National Public Lands Day,** and similar events to capitalize on organized outreach to help introduce people to local trails and hike organizers in their area.





*Together, we can  
create vibrant, active  
communities where  
trails connect schools,  
shopping, and homes.*







## Conclusion

While America is faced with the challenge of becoming and staying healthy and fit, the good news is that we do, in fact, quite clearly understand what needs to be done. We know precisely the amount of physical activity needed to avoid or lessen diseases such as diabetes, coronary disease, and obesity.

We also understand that people tend to be more active when being active is pleasant and enjoyable. Walking, very accessible and available to most, is one of the simplest ways to get a large number of Americans on the path to better health. But as most of us understand intuitively, walking on a treadmill

or around the same city block day after day is likely to get routine and even dull, and, human nature being what it is, it is unlikely to be continued into the distant future.

Hiking, however, on various close-to-home trails and being in nature is more about recreation and enjoyment. The positive health effects could possibly even be termed “collateral benefits” as they are secondary in nature to the reason hikers continue hiking routinely.

Making more hiking trails available to more Americans then makes sense if we are to facilitate healthy recreation that

will be pursued for the sake of enjoyment, not just health. Together, we can create vibrant, active communities where trails connect schools, shopping, and homes; where walking and hiking are enjoyable activities and become a part of the local culture.

**Together, we can make a healthier America.**

**We know what it takes.**

**We know what must change.**

**We must simply commit ourselves to seeing it through.**







# Tips to Get You Started on the Trail to **BETTER HEALTH**





## Getting Started

Before beginning a new physical fitness regimen get a check-up from your doctor, and once given clearance, just put on comfortable walking shoes and clothing and step out your front door.

- ▶ **Begin with short walks** but aim to walk almost every day—even if it's just for 10 minutes.
- ▶ **Explore different routes with different challenges,** including a few hills once you're up for it. A little variety will add enjoyment to your walks and challenge you mentally as well as physically. Once a week, reward yourself with a longer hike, perhaps on a trail that's not so near your house—new surroundings are stimulating!
- ▶ **Find a nearby trail that will engage your senses.** Trails that offer some natural scenery, even just a few trees here and there or a view of a river, make for a pleasant hike that you'll want to do again and again.

## AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY'S 10 ESSENTIALS OF HIKING



- Appropriate footwear
- Map & compass/GPS
- Water
- Food
- Extra clothing/rain gear (dress in layers)
- Safety items: light, emergency whistle
- First aid items
- Multi-purpose tool
- Sun screen & sun glasses
- Daypack/backpack

- ▶ For more fitness benefits without adding more time, **try adding some weight** (start light) to a small backpack. This is good for bone-strengthening as well.<sup>43</sup>







## Hiking with Children

One of the keys things to remember when hiking with children is that the trek no longer becomes about getting from point A to point B, but more about exploring the trail and what's on it. With that in mind, here are a few thoughts to help keep your hike kid-friendly:

- ▶ **Have fun and be flexible.** Be open to changing your plans along the way.
- ▶ **Give the kids some control.** Let the children set the pace and allow them to make some choices along the way such as which trail to take or where to stop for lunch.

They'll naturally want to explore their surroundings and examine new bugs, touch trees and logs, and pause to look at birds. (We should all do this!)

- ▶ **Bring snacks and plenty of fluids.** Make sure to stop and drink frequently. Kids may be so interested in their new environment that they don't realize how thirsty they are. High energy foods and plenty of water will keep them in good spirits.
- ▶ **Dress yourself and your children in layers.** Be aware of your child's body

temperature. If you are carrying a child, he or she may be cold while you are quite warm. Or conversely, you may feel chilled while your child is warm from running around and playing.

- ▶ **Pick a short, interesting hike and allow lots of time.** Choose a trail with a destination such as an overlook, waterfall, historic site, stream or lake. Allow children time to investigate interesting things along the way.
- ▶ **Teach, sing, and play games with your kids.** Discuss how long the trail is, signs of impending weather, how to read a map, or how to identify plants and animals.

Safety tip: put a safety whistle in each pack or on a zipper pull. Review with your children—each hike—what to do if they should become separated from you. Ensure that they know to stay put and blow their whistle in 3 sharp bursts. Sometimes kids “get it” it better if they're told to use the whistle to “find Mom or Dad” rather than if they're lost, since being “lost” isn't always readily apparent to them.





## Keep it fresh— Explore New Trails

While the trails near home provide a convenient way to get outdoors, breathe some fresh air, and enjoy some exercise, it's worth periodically rewarding yourself with a hike that's not "the usual." You'll enjoy the change of scenery and be presented with differing physical challenges that will work new muscles.

If you're unaccustomed to going into large parks and natural areas, keep the following tips in mind:

- ▶ **Do a little homework and have a map of the trail** (digital is fine) before you go. Have an idea of the route and elevation changes.
- ▶ **Let someone know where you'll be going and when you expect to return.** This is likely the most important thing you can do before leaving home.
- ▶ **Aim to be back at the trailhead before dusk.** Plan your time on the trail so that you turn around when your time is half up even if

you haven't reached your destination such as a waterfall or overlook yet. If you've gone downhill a lot, allow more time for the largely uphill hike back to the trailhead.

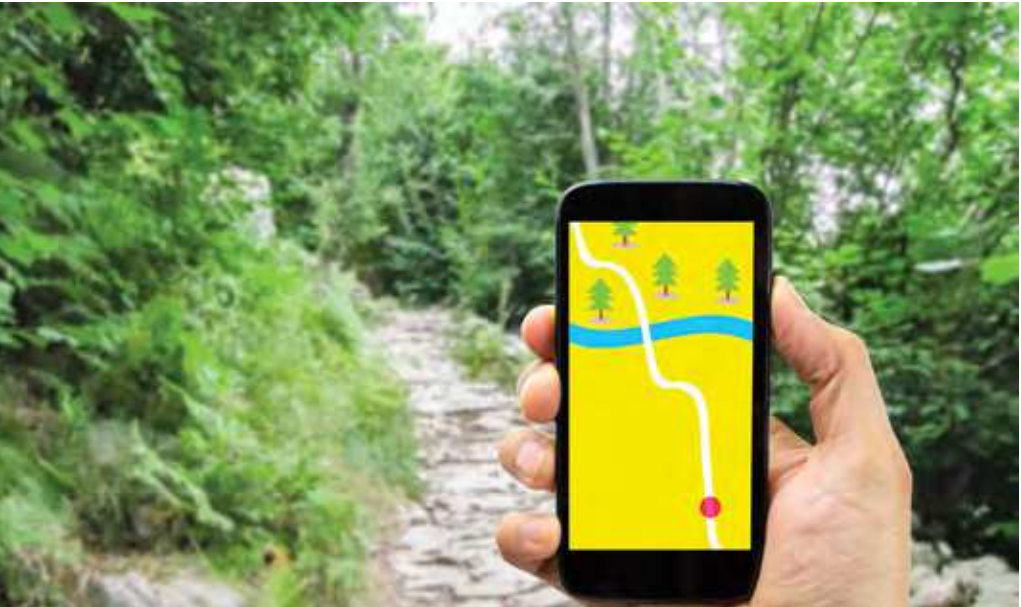
- ▶ **Always put some extra clothing in your pack.** Assume it will be somewhat colder and wetter at some point during your hike.
- ▶ **Bring your good camera!** New sights, unusual birds and wildlife, and wonderful scenic vistas are a part of your reward when exploring new trails and places.

People interested in discovering new trails or groups with whom to walk and hike can find a listing of American Hiking Society Alliance members on their website, [AmericanHiking.org](http://AmericanHiking.org). Internet searches may also reveal other nearby organizations as well. No matter where you want to hike, odds are there's somebody who'd be happy to share their favorite trails with you.

If hiking with others, be considerate of those who prefer to hike at a slower pace. Enjoy the journey.







## The Connected Hiker—Technology in Nature

### TRACK YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

There are many ways we can measure how much we walk these days. The simplest way, perhaps, is with a basic pedometer. Usually clipped to a belt loop or pocket, a pedometer counts a person's steps and computes the total mileage.

Frequently our cell phones also have built-in or downloadable health apps that can also help measure our daily activity,

particularly steps and total mileage. This can provide a convenient method to do some basic tracking without purchasing any additional equipment.

For those who want more refined data or more types of fitness tracking in addition to steps and mileage, many people now use activity trackers/fitness trackers. These activity trackers are usually wristbands that at a minimum track steps and distance, but also frequently monitor sleep and even measure heart rate. Additionally, most of these trackers synch with software programs that let you

track your activity and progress towards a goal.

### DIGITAL MAPS AND GPS

While American Hiking Society recommends that when travelling in remote backcountry regions each hiker have a compass and paper map that are not reliant on battery power, most hikers today regularly use apps and GPS programs that are available on their phones or on stand-alone GPS devices.

Especially if you're able to download the maps you'll likely need while you still have a wi-fi connection, digital maps and tracking apps can provide both important and fun information for your hike. You can measure your distance and speed, map a new route and save it to do again another day, view side trails that lead to interesting sights, and much more. Many map/GPS apps also provide data such as elevation, allow you to attach a photo to a specific point on the trail, and even view others' hikes or share yours with friends.

While you're using any app, fitness tracker, or map—don't forget to look around you, enjoy the view, and be in the moment.





# National Trails Day

## AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY'S NATIONAL TRAILS DAY®

American Hiking Society's National Trails Day® (NTD) is the nation's largest celebration of America's trails and all that trails offer. Founded in 1993, this annual celebration gets hundreds of thousands of Americans out onto nearby trails, engaged in outdoor recreation, and pitching in on volunteer efforts that benefit our trails and parks. Every year, Americans of all walks of life experience nearby trails that they didn't know were there and thousands more connect with neighbors who share their love of the outdoors and trails.

National Trails Day has been celebrated every year on the first Saturday of June and has grown into one of America's largest, community-based, outdoor initiatives. Whether they gather to hike, bike, paddle, learn, or pitch in on needed trail work, they join in the celebration of America's own unique trails system.

In just the last decade, Americans have accomplished some amazing things on National Trails Day:

▶ 1.7 million people got outside and active on trails in their community and on public lands.

- ▶ 18,000 trail events took place in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.
- ▶ More than 25,000 trail volunteers contributed more than one million volunteer hours on trail stewardship projects, building and maintaining more than 19,000 miles of trail.
  - This one day of volunteering over the last 10 years has a value of more than \$29 million in donated time in public service.
- ▶ Trail enthusiasts have cumulatively hiked nearly 1.5 million miles.







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**AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY**

thanks our Hiking Trails in America report sponsors:



**AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY** is grateful to the following organizations that provided assistance and information for this report:

- National Park Service,
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General
- Healthy Parks Healthy People and Park Rx
- Warrior Expeditions
- Hike it Baby

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thanks its Board of Directors, especially:  
Larry Luxenberg · Amy Csink · Jack Hess





PHOTO BY ROB CHEN

**FOUNDED IN 1976, AMERICAN HIKING SOCIETY** is the only national organization that promotes and protects foot trails, their surrounding natural areas, and the hiking experience. As the national voice for hikers, American Hiking Society recognizes that foot trails and hiking are essential to connect people with nature, offer access to public lands, conserve open

space, provide biological corridors for diverse plants and wildlife, and for the health of Americans and our natural environment. We represent millions of hikers who are committed to beautiful places to hike and believe that the preservation of hiking trails and their environments is important and a worthwhile legacy to leave future generations.

American Hiking Society champions conservation issues, builds public and private partnerships, supports volunteer stewardship, and provides critical resources to help plan, fund, and develop trails. We also provide resources to the public about how and where to hike and are committed to increasing the participation and enjoyment of hiking by everyone.



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