

Walk, don't drive! Community promotion of physical activity has 2-fold benefit

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About half of the car trips in the U.S. are less than five miles—a distance easily navigated by walking or cycling. Reducing short-distance car trips has many benefits—it decreases car accidents, has positive benefits for the environment and increases physical health and activity, says communication professor Edward Maibach of George Mason University. An expert in climate change communication research, Maibach says that community leaders should make promotion of physical activity a priority.

"There are lots of proven low-cost options that communities can use to encourage people to get out of their cars and walk or ride instead," he says. "Use of these options helps people remain healthy (by promoting [physical activity](#) and reducing obesity) and helps reduce heat-trapping pollutants that cause global warming."

In a recent article in the journal *Preventative Medicine*, Maibach suggests that policy makers and government officials at all levels should look at communication, marketing and policy enhancements that can be implemented with relative ease to promote active transport.

Maibach cites the Web site Active Living by Design (<http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/>) as showcasing many examples of successful programs such as city-bike sharing, customized walking or cycling maps and grassroots campaigns.

"One of my favorite examples is 'walking school buses' in which

children and a few parents walk together to the local school," says Maibach.

He also suggests policy changes such as reducing speed limits, giving cyclists priority at intersections and closing some roads to cars, can also encourage people to consider alternative ways of commuting.

"There is no one magic bullet. All of these examples can be effective here in the U.S., and all should be implemented in as many communities as possible. The more that are implemented, the more we will wean people away from sole reliance on their cars when they could be walking and/or riding, and improving their health as a result."

Source: George Mason University

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