Get Up & Move!

Walkable Communities

This month you have learned how walking can help you to stay active and healthy. Sometimes people believe that it is difficult to find places in their community where they can walk safely. This month your club can help to make your community more “walkable.”

Today, communities can pose walking challenges with traffic, dangerous roads, and a lack of sidewalks or walking paths. Communities are trying to overcome these challenges and a national movement has started to make communities more “walkable.”

A walkable community is one in which people don’t have to always use a car for transportation. “Walkable” communities are great because they have stores, entertainment, and services all within walking distance. Some characteristics of a walkable community include:

- Town centers with a set of healthy stores
- Areas designed for people first, cars second
- Safe, adequate and appealing public places for people to gather and sit
- Easy access for people of all ages and abilities
- Main streets that are speed-controlled and interconnected, or laid out in a grid
- Many people walking

There are things your club can do this month to encourage your community to be more “walkable.” Changes usually require the help of more than one person. It might be a good idea to recruit neighbors, community leaders, local officials and business people to help you. Your first step might be to look at your community to see what could be fixed or improved, such as broken or overgrown sidewalks, or not enough stoplights and traffic signs. You could then divide the issues that you have identified in your community and break up into committees, so that each committee has one issue to work on.

Below are some problems that you might see in your community and possible suggestions for how to fix/change them.

Problem: There are no sidewalks or they are cluttered or cracked.

Solution: Contact your community’s public works department about the problem. You can also start a petition or have neighbors call local elected officials. Remind people that sidewalks make a safer, more attractive community and increases real estate values. Ask neighbors to clear walkways in front of their homes that may be blocked by bushes, tree branches, or trash.
You might even want to publish your requests in a community newsletter by writing a letter to the editor or to community residents.

**Problem:** Cars speed on neighborhood streets and don’t slow down for pedestrians. Streets may be hard to cross.

**Solutions:** Ask city or county officials to add speed bumps, crosswalks, stop and yield signs, or lights to slow traffic. You might want to attend a homeowner’s association meeting to raise awareness of the problem and to gather support. Another idea would be to ask local law enforcement to monitor streets to make sure people are driving at the speed limit and following traffic signs and lights.

Remember that changing your community to make it more “walkable” might take time. Helping to improve your community by making it easier for people to find safe places for physical activity is very empowering. Not only will you improve the livability of your community, but you will also help your community to **Get Up and Move!**

Source: [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)