



Green Sense 12/29/13

Take up Walking this New Year

Researchers have discovered a “wonder drug” for many of today’s most common medical problems, according to Dr. Bob Sallis, of Kaiser Permanente in Fontana, California (details at www.everybodywalk.org). It’s been proven to help treat or prevent diabetes, depression, dementia, breast and colon cancer, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, obesity, anxiety and osteoporosis. “The drug is called walking,” Sallis announced.

To help you take advantage of this wonderful new health treatment, Walkable Reading is hosting a “Winter Walk at the Town Forest” on January 11 (starting at 1 PM). Reading has some wonderful places that are fun to explore in the winter, and this walk will take residents into the beautiful woods at the north end of town.

Joining Walkable Reading on this walk in the woods should also get your creative juices flowing. New England’s famous author and philosopher Henry Thoreau claimed that his thoughts began to flow ‘the moment my legs began to move.’ Research has since proven out Thoreau’s finding, showing that people who exercise regularly are actually better at creative thinking. This research by Leiden University cognitive psychologist Lorenza Colzato, was published in an article in the scientific magazine ‘Frontiers in Human Neuroscience’ (<http://socialsciences.leiden.edu/>).

In Colzato’s research project, people from a group of frequent exercisers appeared to outperform those who did not exercise regularly. Colzato said, “We think that physical movement is good for the ability to think flexibly, but only if the body is used to being active. Otherwise a large part of the energy intended for creative thinking goes to the movement itself.” Colzato notes, “Exercising on a regular basis may thus act as a cognitive enhancer promoting creativity in inexpensive and healthy ways.”

Dr. Sallis recommends a dosage of 30 minutes a day, five days a week, but he notes that children should double that to 60 minutes a day, seven days a week. Side effects may include weight loss, improved mood, improved sleep and bowel habits and stronger muscles and bones, as well as looking and feeling better.

While other activities that are aerobic work equally well, Dr. Sallis cites three factors that make walking the most effective treatment: 1) low or no cost; 2) simple to do for people of all ages, incomes and fitness levels, and 3) walking is Americans’ favorite physical activity, so we are more likely to stick with a walking program than other fitness or pharmaceutical prescriptions.

Everybodywalk.org notes that other studies published in leading medical journals show that walking and other physical activity could cut rates of many of those diseases by at least 40 percent, according to the American College of Sports Medicine. This would save Americans

more than \$100 billion a year in health care costs, according to the American Public Health Association. Based on this evidence the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends 150 minutes of physical activity a week for adults.

Walking is an activity that can be alone or with others. But it has been found that having an exercise buddy helps to keep with a program. So enlist family or friends to have walking dates. It's time well spent with the kids, unwinding after work with your spouse, or catching up with a friend.

So start out the New Year with the first 60 minutes or so in the town forest - the January 11th walk is suitable for both children and adults. Meet at the trailhead at the end of Sunset Rock Lane, at the driveway to the Wood End School. If you haven't had a chance to use the new trail entering into the Town Forest this is the perfect opportunity.

Start the New Year off right with some fresh air and exercise. Check for any updates on Walkable Reading's Facebook page. If you have questions, you can email Walkable Reading at walkablereading@comcast.net.

Plan to leave the car behind when you can, and add walking to your routine in 2014.

A column by members of Reading's Climate Committee Gina Snyder, Michele Benson and Stephanie Anderberg