

Reasons to Walk in More Detail

Health Reasons

Good for the body:

- All movement that involves carrying body weight – such as walking – will help children and young people to maintain energy balance.
- Children with lower levels of physical activity are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease.
- People who are physically active tend to have a lower overall risk of cancer.
- The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is increasing in children and adolescence in the UK. The emergence of type 2 diabetes at younger ages may, therefore, be due to the increase of obesity and its associated disorders and the decrease in levels of physical activity observed in children over the past 30 years.

Good for the bones:

- Achieving as high a skeletal mass as possible during growth will have long term health benefits, as it provides a reserve of bone tissue to counter the inevitable loss of bone that accompanies ageing, especially if the activity is maintained. It reduces the likelihood of developing osteoporosis and the attendant risk of fractures.
- Weight bearing activities (including walking) are particularly good for increasing bone mineral density.
- Children who do activities that physically stress the skeleton such as running or jumping have 5% to 15% more bone mineral density than inactive children.

Good for the mind:

- Physically active people feel happier and more satisfied with life.
- Physical activity is important for children's psychological well-being.
- Children with lower physical activity levels have more symptoms of psychological distress than more active children.
- A positive relationship between physical activity and well-being has been identified independent of social class and health status.
- Short bouts (10-15 minutes) of moderate intensity walking have recently been shown to induce significant positive changes in mood in experimental studies.
- Children with higher physical activity levels are more likely to have better cognitive functioning. Cognitive function includes memory, reaction time, reasoning ability, decision making and problem solving.

Environmental benefits associated with promoting Walk to School Week

Emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases from motor transport can be detrimental to the environment. Short journeys, such as those making up most of the 'school run', are particularly damaging because they create a disproportionate increase in air pollution since catalytic converters only work when the engine is fully warmed up.

Reducing the volume of traffic by increasing walking to school will help to alleviate some of the negative consequences of pollution by:

- *reducing the effect on global warming – emissions from motor transport are Britain's fastest-growing contributor to climate change (global warming), which has been identified as the greatest environmental threat faced by the planet*
- *reducing the damage caused to buildings.*

- reducing damage to the local environment – the countryside and wildlife will be preserved.
- reducing associated health problems, particularly respiratory conditions (1.3million children in Britain have asthma).
- reducing traffic congestion, particularly in the vicinity of the school.
- reducing levels of traffic noise. Encouraging more children to walk to school will also help to reduce petrol consumption.