University of Richmond Employee Wellness

The Secret to Good Health May Be a Walk in the Park

Even though I was heading to a highly coveted job at The New York Times in 1965, I was heartbroken to leave Minneapolis, where I had begun my journalistic career two years earlier.

Minneapolis was then, and still is, a slice of heaven for anyone who enjoys the great outdoors. According to an ambitious project of the Trust for Public Land, Minneapolis leads the nation’s metropolitan areas in providing the best overall access for the most people to well-equipped and serviced public parks and recreation. Its neighbor, St. Paul, is a close second.

Not surprising, then, is the fact that Minneapolis-St. Paul is also ranked the healthiest urban region in the country. And no, their residents are not preserved by the cold! If anything, they are out there enjoying it—ice skating, cross-country skiing, sledding, cycling, running, walking, you name it.

An analysis by the trust revealed that 96 percent of Minneapolitans and 98 percent of St. Paulites live within a 10-minute walk of a park, compared with 70 percent of residents in the 100 largest cities over all. New York City, with 99 percent of residents enjoying easy access to a park, playground, trail or other open area, ranks ninth overall in terms of public outdoor access when park size and other factors are considered.

Despite its generally clement weather, Charlotte, N.C., with an average temperature of 60 degrees, 218 sunny days and only four inches of snow and 41 inches of rain a year, has the poorest overall access to public lands among the 100 major metropolitan areas studied. The analysis covered residents in 14,000 communities the Census Bureau designates as “urban areas,” which are where approximately 85 percent of Americans now live.

Last year, in partnership with the National Recreation and Parks Association and Urban Land Institute, the trust started a noble initiative that could bring Minneapolis-type benefits to every resident in the country: access to “a high-quality park within a 10-minute, or half-mile, walk,” Adrian Benepe, senior vice president for the trust and former New York City parks commissioner, told me.

“Parks are key to good, healthy cities,” Mr. Benepe said. “The connection between parks and health is well established.” A 10-minute walk can enhance physical fitness, reduce the risk of chronic disease and improve brain function, like learning and memory. The 10 minutes it takes to walk back home, not to mention the activity done in between, are a bonus.

As an added benefit, Mr. Benepe said, “Parks mitigate the effects of climate change. Their trees absorb and store carbon and trap particulate matter on leaf surfaces. They absorb storm water runoff, keeping it out of sewers and countering pollution, and they reduce the impact of the urban island heat effect.”

There are also untold social and community benefits linked to public park spaces. Friends of mine, Kathryn Morrissette and Michael Smith, each had a dog and met during off-leash hours in Prospect Park in Brooklyn. They married and became the proud parents of two boys, Dillon, 3, and Wyatt, 1, who now frolic in the park as well.

Along with Minneapolis and St. Paul, the trust’s analysis suggests that the most livable urban areas in the country are Washington, D.C., Arlington, Va., San Francisco, Portland, Ore., Cincinnati, Chicago and New York.

Although the trust is currently focused on metropolitan areas, Mr. Benepe said he’s “worried about people who live in small towns, where the land is privately owned. It may be colored green on the map, but it’s not necessarily accessible.”

Source: New York Times
Healthy Cooking: Breakfast Pancakes

Ingredients:
2 medium ripe bananas
2 eggs
1/2 cup milk or almond milk
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1 1/2 cups rolled oats
2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp. salt
Oil or butter, for cooking

Directions:
1. Add all the ingredients to a blender and blend until completely smooth (about 30-60 seconds). Let the batter sit while the pan heats up.
2. Lightly coat a griddle with coconut oil or butter and place over medium heat.
3. Once the pan is hot, add 1/3 cup of the batter to the pan for each pancake and cook for 2-4 minutes until the pancakes slightly puff up and you can see bubbles along the edges.
4. Flip the pancakes and cook until golden brown on the underside. Lower the heat to medium-low if you find that the pancakes are browning too quickly.
5. Repeat until you have made all of your pancakes. The recipe should make about 9 pancakes.

Educational Corner: Heat Illness

Your body normally cools itself by sweating. During hot weather, especially when it is very humid, sweating just isn’t enough to cool you off. Your body temperature can rise to dangerous levels and you can develop a heat illness.

Most heat illnesses happen when you stay out in the heat too long. Exercising and working outside in high heat can also lead to heat illness. Older adults, young children, and those who are sick or overweight are most at risk. Taking certain medicines or drinking alcohol can also raise your risk.

Heat-related illnesses include:
- Heat stroke - a life-threatening illness in which body temperature may rise above 106° F in minutes. Symptoms include dry skin, a rapid, strong pulse, dizziness, nausea, and confusion. If you see any of these signs, get medical help right away.
- Heat exhaustion - an illness that can happen after several days of exposure to high temperatures and not enough fluids. Symptoms include heavy sweating, rapid breathing, and a fast, weak pulse. If it is not treated, it can turn into heat stroke.
- Heat cramps - muscle pains or spasms that happen during heavy exercise. You usually get them in your abdomen, arms, or legs.
- Heat rash - skin irritation from excessive sweating. It is more common in young children. You can lower your risk of heat illness by drinking fluids to prevent dehydration, replacing lost salt and minerals, and limiting your time in the heat.

Source: CDC
How to Motivate Yourself to Work Out

Are you looking to make your occasional strength class or Sunday spin session a regular ritual? You may be one of many casual exercisers who wants to sweat more often, but struggles with finding the workout motivation to make fitness a part of your daily routine. Conventional wisdom hasn’t been particularly helpful in figuring out how to get in the groove and become that person who says, “I’ll meet you for brunch later. Gotta fit in my run first.” You’re told you have to “want it” enough. Or that you have to do something 21 days in a row before it becomes second nature. But what do you do on the 29th day when it’s raining outside and you’re dying to skip your run and sleep for another hour instead? Here are some tips to keep you motivated to work out:

1. **Give yourself a real reward.**

Sure, some people might be motivated by vague goals such as “better health” or “weight control.” But if that’s not doing it for you, journalist Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* advises making the benefits of working out more tangible, such as by treating yourself to a smoothie or an episode of *Game of Thrones* afterwards. He describes creating a neurological “habit loop,” which involves a cue to trigger the behavior (setting out your spinning shoes next to your bag), the routine (making it through spinning class) and then the reward. “An extrinsic reward is so powerful because your brain can latch on to it and make the link that the behavior is worthwhile,” he explains. “It increases the odds the routine becomes a habit.”

Over time, the motivation becomes intrinsic, as the brain begins to associate sweat and pain with the surge of endorphins — those feel-good chemicals released in the brain that are responsible for that “I-feel-freaking-amazing” rush you get after a great gym session. Once you’ve trained your brain to recognize that the workout itself is the reward, you won’t even want the treat.

2. **Sign a commitment contract.**

We can make promises to ourselves all day long, but research shows we’re more likely to follow through with pledges when we make them in front of friends. You can up the ante even more by signing a contract agreeing to pay a pal $20 every time you skip Pilates. “It’s a simple notion of changing the cost,” explains Jeremy Goldhaber-Fiebert, PhD, assistant professor of medicine at Stanford University who studies health decision science. “I say I’m going to make a commitment to do something for a certain amount of time, such as exercising 30 minutes three times a week for 12 weeks. If I don’t do that, I’m going to pay some kind of penalty, whether it’s monetary or the embarrassment of having friends know I didn’t live up to my word.”

3. **Rethink positive thinking.**

Devotees of positive thinking have long promoted visualizing the benefits of a behavior as a motivational strategy. For example, when I’m deciding whether to get out of bed to go running in the morning, it helps to imagine how the sun will feel on my face as I run around the reservoir. Or how delighted I’ll be when I see my new muscles developing. After identifying your wish and visualizing the outcome, you have to identify what’s holding you back — a technique she calls “mental contrasting.” In one study of 51 female students who claimed they wanted to eat fewer junk food snacks, researchers asked each woman to imagine the benefits of nibbling on better foods. Those who identified the trigger that made healthy snacking difficult for them — and came up with a plan to reach for fruit when cravings hit — were most successful at sticking to their goal.

4. **Find your fitness tribe.**

What will ultimately inspire you to get up and start moving is a strong, supportive community. The laughs, high fives and words of encouragement from the bonds people make are things money simply can’t buy. From CrossFit boxes to run clubs to yogi circles, there’s a fitness squad for everyone. Find a workout that makes you feel good and surround yourself with people that help build your confidence as much as your strength. The cost of putting yourself out there? Priceless.

Source: Daily Burn
Summer is here and with it comes prime barbecue season. BBQs mean good company and good food. If you are trying to eat healthy, eating at a summer cookout can be challenging. Many of the traditional barbecue foods are loaded with fat, salt, sugar and calories. However, there are plenty of delicious healthy options.

First rule is don’t go hungry. It’s hard to stick to appropriate portion sizes when you are starving so remember to eat a snack before going to your barbecue. Also, offer to bring a dish that you know is healthy. This way you are sure to have at least one healthy option. Here are some healthy food options that you can choose to put on your plate at your next cook-out.

Choose a lean protein such as chicken, veggie burger, or turkey burger.

Fill half your plate with raw veggies and fresh fruit such as a chopped salad, sliced crudité, watermelon or fruit salad.

Beans are a great source of fiber. Choose baked beans are your carbohydrate for your meal. They are a good source of fiber and have protein.

Corn on the cob is a good starchy vegetable choice... just watch the butter and salt. Corn is a starchy vegetable and should count as your carbohydrate for the meal. Add a corn on the cob for a healthy, fiber filled carbohydrate.

Try eating your burger bun-free. If you have chosen baked beans or corn-on-the-cob, then make your burger or chicken, bun free. Remember, carbohydrates should take up ¼ of your plate.

Choose kebabs with lots of vegetables (and meat). A kebab has your meat and some veggies. It cuts down on the total amount of meat. You could also choose a leaner protein option by choosing chicken or turkey kebab.

Eat a vinegar-based coleslaw instead of mayonnaise-based. Mayonnaise is high in fat where vinegar-based coleslaw usually is much lower in fat and is a much healthier choice.