

## **Walking to Work**

*by Katherine Ziff*

The first Friday in April is National Walk to Work Day, but why wait until then to reap the benefits of walking. Consider walking to work if you live within a two mile radius of Ohio University. If you want to walk yet live a good distance from campus, consider parking in a more remote lot and walking an extra fifteen minutes to your work place.

### **Why walk to work?**

Walking to work will save you money. A four mile roundtrip commute, using the 2008 standard IRS mileage reimbursement rate of \$.485 per mile, costs you nearly \$10 per week. In addition to reducing your costs, you will also be reducing carbon monoxide emissions from your vehicle.

Eliminate parking problems by walking to work. You will not have to search for a spot in a university lot nor will you receive a ticket for forgetting your parking hang tag. If you use City of Athens metered parking, forget digging for quarters on a daily basis and worrying about moving your car every two hours. You will also say goodbye to City of Athens parking tickets. And you will never get a speeding ticket walking to work.

Daily walks to and from work will build health and wellness. Walking builds bone mass and can help prevent osteoporosis. Thirty minutes a day of walking at a moderate pace reduces the risk of heart disease; an hour a day cuts the risk of some cancers, stroke, and diabetes. Walking also burns calories: while a thirty minute car drive burns a little over 40 calories, a thirty minute walk at a moderate pace burns around 150 calories. Over time, walking can prevent weight gain and even result in weight loss by building lean muscle and getting the metabolism going.

Walking to work, a slow but sure way to fitness, also has psychological benefits. Walking lifts mood and relieves stress by encouraging the body's production of endorphins. A twenty minute walking commute is an opportunity to clear the head for the day ahead, and arriving home from work relaxed and refreshed from a brisk walk is a gift to yourself and your family.

Forge connections with your community in unusual ways by walking to and from work. One of my morning walking routes takes me past a gardener at a church along Mill Street; she routinely says good morning and gives an update on the cleaning and renewal of the garden there. Friends sometimes hail me down and I have a chance to visit for a few minutes. Sometimes I take a Court Street route, where I learn which merchants take the trouble to clean the sidewalk in front of their stores each morning. With the arrival of Fall Quarter, I take up lost and found duty; cell phones and wallets lost the previous night by students litter the landscape of my Palmer Street route to work. I now know the location of Ohio University Police Department and some of the helpful folks behind the intake desk there, where I take the lost items.

Early morning walks to work, before Athens starts to bustle, provide a connection with nature. One early morning I stood with several students admiring a red-tailed hawk perched in a tree above the Burrito Buggy; a month later I stood in front of Crewson House with another OU staffer and watched the hawk dive for (and miss) a squirrel on the lawn. By taking a route through Emeriti Park, I've learned that the great blue heron who left the creek there during construction of Baker has returned to hunt for fish in the new pond adjacent to the University Center. And how many people have seen the fat, sleek woodchuck who lives beneath the concrete entry ramp to Glidden Hall? Of course, what better way to admire the change of seasons than by walking past gardens, lawns, and trees.

### **Tips for Getting Started**

As with any exercise program, check with your physician before beginning. Here are more tips:

1. You must have comfortable shoes for walking. If your work shoes aren't suitable for a thirty minute walk, wear walking shoes and either carry your shoes to work or stash a pair or two at the workplace.
2. Whatever shoes you wear should have a sturdy non-slip sole.
3. Leave the gadgets (cell phone, iPod etc.) in your knapsack. Use walking time to relax mentally and observe your surroundings.
4. Keep a small, light umbrella in your bag, just in case.
5. For walking in traffic areas with poor visibility, carry a bicycle strobe light.
6. Avoid routes or intersections plagued by fast, heavy traffic and lacking in proper pedestrian crossings (like Richland Avenue) by taking short-cuts across campus and town. Always take safety precautions like crossing with the light, watching for moving vehicles, and walking against oncoming traffic where there are no sidewalks.

### **Campus Resources**

WellWorks, Ohio University's wellness program, offers an array of support for walking, including laminated maps of walking routes. Walks to work can be counted toward points in WellWorks' incentive program.

See <http://www.ohiou.edu/wellworks>

To locate a university parking lot which will give you a fifteen minute walk, see the parking map at <http://www.ohiou.edu/athens/parking/>