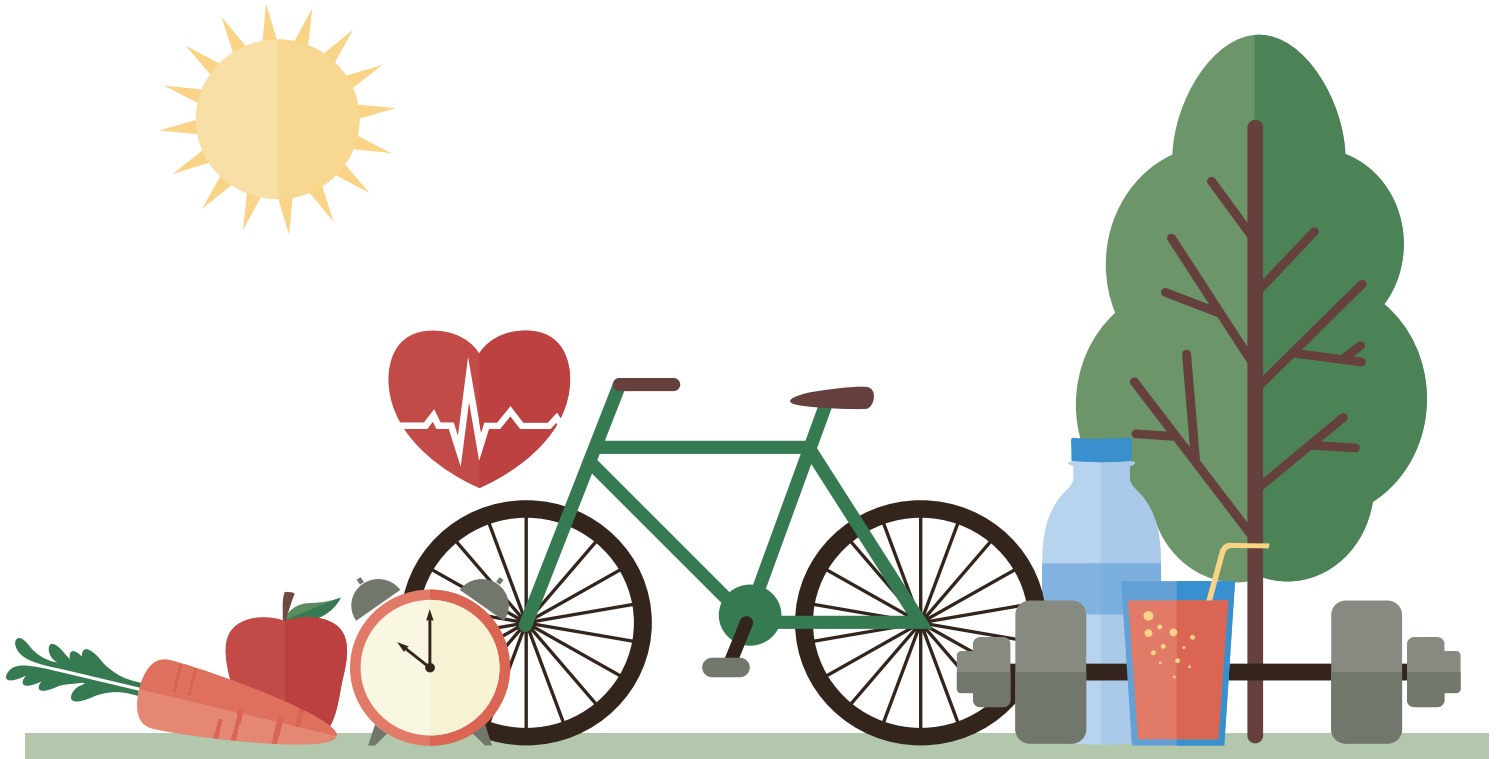


“The people you surround yourself with influence your behaviors, so choose friends who have healthy habits.” - Dan Buettner, author of “The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who’ve Lived the Longest”



Make the *healthy* choice the *easy* choice

“**M**ake the healthy choice, the easy choice,” is a what being a Blue Zones Project community is all about, but what does it mean, and why does it matter?

If it’s easy to eat highly processed, unhealthy food, that is what many people will do. If it’s easy to eat fresh, healthy food that is affordable, that is what many people will do. If it’s easy to drive everywhere, that is what many people will do. If it’s easy to bike or walk to nearby errands or for recreation, that is what many people will do.



Michelle Avola
 Guest Columnist
 Naples Daily News
 USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Some of us will go out of our way to make the harder, less inviting choice because we know it’s good for us. Many will not, which is why our nation is dealing with staggering obesity rates and the health consequences that accompany it, includ-

See **HEALTHY**, Page 7D

Healthy

Continued from Page 4D

ing lower life expectancy than previous generations.

Numerous studies show that people who engage in daily, extended physical activity are much more likely to avoid age-related ills like heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer, and to be in optimal physical and mental shape, compared to their peers who get minimal exercise. Does this mean we all need to hit the gym for five hours a day to experience better physical and mental health? Fortunately, no.

The World Health Organization recommends that adults take part in at least 75 minutes of physical activity a day. If that seems like a lot, here are some ways to easily incorporate more activity in your day: hop on your bike and pedal around your neighborhood before breakfast; gather some friends and walk to coffee or lunch a few times a week; get a basket for your bike and ride to the grocery store for fresh produce and meat each day; take the family for a ride or walk on the Gordon River Greenway every weekend; rent a kayak or canoe and explore; turn up the music, move the coffee table and dance; set up an obstacle course in the backyard and compete against the family in your own version of American Ninja Warrior; take a brisk walk with your dog, significant other, or neighbors after dinner.

None of those examples require stepping foot in the gym and cost little to nothing. However, safe, bikeable and walkable communities — the mission of Naples Pathways Coalition (NPC) — are necessary for several of those suggestions to be an easy choice. Many areas in the City of Naples and parts of Collier County have

Numerous studies show that people who engage in daily, extended physical activity are much more likely to avoid age-related ills like heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer, and to be in optimal physical and mental shape, compared to their peers who get minimal exercise.

seen tremendous improvements in sidewalks, bike lanes and pathways that make it more inviting to walk, jog or bike. Many of us are not as lucky, and active transportation or outdoor recreation is not easily accessible.

The City of Naples adopted the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan in 2007 and Collier County adopted the Comprehensive Pathways Plan in 2012, after much input from NPC and our members. These documents serve as a planning guide when roads are improved or built to help ensure the needs and safety of pedestrians and bicyclists are included in the project.

Several factors impede progress of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure enhancements many of us desire. From the time a need is identified to project completion, transportation projects take a long time. Right-of-way is limited in many projects so adding sidewalks, bike lanes, or pathways is a challenge. Funding for improvement projects is limited.

Numerous areas in Florida and the rest of the country have off-road, multi-use pathway and trail systems that draw tourism, encourage safe, active transporta-

tion, and provide healthy, free recreation. Collier County does not. Our lack of connected pathways is not only unfortunate, but a huge missed opportunity when considering tourism, the health and well-being of our residents, and the safety of vulnerable road users without access to a vehicle.

The questionable condition of our beaches is affecting tourism, distracted driving makes biking and walking on or near our roadways concerning, and the health of many in the area declines due to a sedentary lifestyle — more reasons why we need an off-road, multi-use pathway system in Collier County.

Naples Pathways Coalition has partnered with the national organization, Rails to Trails Conservancy, to help us develop a connected pathway system. We may lack abandoned railways to take advantage of, but we have targeted areas for off-road pathways to be built, and we have the passion to make this a reality for Collier County! To find out how you can be part of this important project and help make active transportation and outdoor recreation the easy choice, please contact Michelle@NaplesPathways.org.

Michelle Avola is the executive director of Naples Pathways Coalition, a nonprofit organization that works to make the greater Naples area a safe, bikeable, walkable community. Email Michelle@naplespathways.org or see naplespathways.org.

HEARING AIDS
Service and Repairs

