

Blue Zones

“I find it a lot healthier for me to be someplace where I can go outside in my bare feet.” – James Taylor

How changing your work commute can help you live longer



PECIAL TO THE NAPLES DAILY NEWS

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Blue zones residents move naturally every day simply because their environments nudge them to do so. They walk to a neighbor's house to pick up the latest gossip, they spend their work days in the fields with their sheep, they spend the afternoon gardening, or they walk to work because their village is designed with the human foot in mind, rather than designed for maximum parking spaces and ease of driving.

In the United States, we've engineered movement out of our daily lives. In 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 85.4 percent of the 150 million workers drove to their workplace in an automobile, while only 0.6 percent of the population biked to work¹.

In a recent study published in *The BMJ*, researchers found that active transportation users had a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer, and all-cause mortality in follow up years — whether by bike, on foot, public transportation, or a combination of the three². The cyclists, though, saw the greatest benefit with a 41 percent lower risk of all-cause mortality than those who took public transportation, or were not active at all during their commutes to work. Walkers showed a 24 percent lower risk of having a heart-attack than non-active transportation users. Jason

Gill, study author from the University of Glasgow noted, “What these results suggest is that active commuting is a possibility for a much wider range of people than those who live within a narrow circumference of where they work. If we can change cities so that it's easier for people to be more active, then people will be.

What if biking isn't even an option?

While walking or biking to work may be an untapped opportunity for some people to move naturally in their daily lives, for others the distance may be too far or could be treacherous. If you work far from home, or drive to an office park crossing freeways without bike lanes or sidewalks, there are still ways for you to sneak in extra movement throughout the day.

1. Start a walking Moai

In Blue Zones Project communities and worksites, leaders help coordinate walking groups of five to eight individuals to gather and socialize weekly. It's a great way to keep yourself accountable and meet a group of new friends with similar values. Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida is holding Moai launches at 4 different locations this Saturday. For time and locations, visit our events page on Facebook at [Facebook.com/BlueZonesProjectSouthwestFlorida](https://www.facebook.com/BlueZonesProjectSouthwestFlorida).

2. Implement walking or standing meetings

Not only will you add steps, but you could boost brainstorming. According to a Stanford University study, participants' creative output increased 60 percent when walking as opposed to sitting.

3. Take the stairs a few times during lunch

You could actually return to work with more energy. There's scientific evidence that suggests 10 minutes of walking or climbing a few flights of stairs is more effective than consuming 50 milligrams of caffeine.

4. Park in the furthest space from the entrance

You may be in a hurry to snag the spot near the door, but by parking far away you can increase your step count. Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida approved worksites like Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida and Bonita Springs Area Chamber of Commerce have designated Blue Zones parking spots located farthest away from the building.

5. Download apps like StretchClock StretchClock, and other apps like it, reminds you to stretch and get up out of your desk throughout the day. It also has helpful tips to guide you through short and easy exercises you can do right in the office.

6. Encourage your employer to have a light movement or yoga class in the morning

Studies have shown that with even just 20 minutes of yoga practice can significantly improve reaction time and accuracy in cognitive test.

7. Get to work 15 minutes early and walk around the building or up and down the stairs

If you can't bike or walk to work, the next best thing is adding the movement to your morning routine as if you had!

Now that you have decided to make a healthier commute and move more at work, you can track all those steps by joining Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida's **Track Your Trek!** On Jan. 20, Blue Zones Project is launching a free, community-wide step challenge. Track your steps for 10 weeks and then celebrate your accomplishments on April 4 at North Collier Regional Park. Our goal is for Southwest Florida to walk the distance it takes to get to all 5 Blue Zones locations around the world (1: Ikaria, Greece 2: Sardinia, Italy 3: Okinawa, Japan 4: Loma Linda, California 5: Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica). RSVP to participate: [Trackyourtrek2020.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com)

By Aislinn Leonard, Business Coordinator at Blue Zones

¹ <https://www.statista.com/chart/11355/how-americans-commute-to-work/>

² <https://www.bmj.com/content/357/bmj.j1456>