

Ebel: Hitting the Trail to Health

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist Published 3:01 p.m. ET Aug. 11, 2018



(Photo: Submitted photo)

Growing up, I always was active. I lived in Bucyrus until I was nine and living in town made it easy to be active where I could ride my bike, play with neighbors, and walk to school. In fourth grade we moved into the country, 10 miles from town, and my activities changed to playing in the woods or the creek, fishing, hunting, exploring the outdoors, and playing school sports.

As an adult, I spend my day behind a desk and drive to work, so being active is just not part of my daily routine. Being active used to come naturally, but now it's something I have to think about, make time for, and work at.

This challenge is all too familiar to most Ohio adults, and unfortunately, many of our children also spend their days behind a desk, on a couch, or staring at a screen instead of exploring, playing, and engaging in physical activities.

Our health stats reflect that decline in physical activity. According to the 2017 Licking County Health Assessment, 70 percent of Licking County adults are either overweight (32 percent) or obese (38 percent). Our children also are paying a price for our sedentary lifestyles with 27 percent of our 7th to 12th grade students being overweight or obese. The health impacts of being inactive and overweight include increased type 2 diabetes rates, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, osteoarthritis, some cancers, and a lower overall quality of life.

Everyone knows that we should eat healthy foods, control our portion sizes, and be physically active, but there are always barriers and excuses that prevent us from reaching our goals. The good news is that we don't need to make a major lifestyle change to have a positive health impact. Start with small steps, like adding a reminder to your calendar at work to get up and take a short walk or plan to walk after work or on the weekend with a friend or family member, trying to eat one more home-cooked meal a week and experimenting with a new healthy recipe. These little changes can help make being active and healthy part of your normal routine – less about something you work on, and more of something you just do.

In Licking County, and central Ohio, we have access to great, free, resources that are just waiting for us. Our local parks have trails varying from easy, flat, paved paths, to more difficult unimproved trails through our hills and valleys. Places like the TJ Evans trail, the Licking Park District parks, Dawes Arboretum, and many more await us. In addition, just a short drive opens up the facilities and trails of the Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks, the Knox County Park District parks, or the world class resources in the Hocking Hills region. Information on many of our local parks and trails can be found at www.trail2health.org.

Get out and get started – short walks around your neighborhood can grow to miles-long hikes through the parks. We may still spend most of our days behind a desk, but don't we wish we could get back to the days where our moms said, "Go outside and play, and don't come back in until I call you!"

Make a plan to regularly visit our trails and parks this summer and fall, go outside and play, and have fun. I hope to see you out there!

Submitted by Licking County Health Commissioner, Joe Ebel, R.S., M.S., M.B.A.

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