

# SALUBRIOUS

Our towns and cities are more than just a collection of streets, businesses, schools and homes. They play a role in how healthy we are. Their physical and social environments have a major impact on the well-being of their residents. Check out these ideas to make your community's name a byword for healthy living.

## 1 NOURISH KIDS' DREAMS

Encourage local schools to establish breakfast clubs for students in the interest of good nutrition and better learning. "Starting the day off on the right foot with breakfast is essential for the development and the future of our children — no matter where we live in Canada," says Daniel Germain, Montreal-based president and founder of Breakfast Clubs of Canada.

Germain, who founded the clubs in 2005 after doing humanitarian work in the developing world, notes that a

nutritious breakfast gives kids an equal chance for success, launches their day solidly, improves their concentration in class and diminishes violence in the schoolyard. "It improves their well-being, their academic performance and their self-image," he says. To find out more, call 1 866 794 4900 or go to [www.breakfastclubscanada.org](http://www.breakfastclubscanada.org).

## 2 GET YOUNGSTERS MOVING

Ask your neighbourhood school to enrol in the Active & Safe Routes to School program of Green Communities Canada. This program promotes the Walking School Bus, made up of young students and adults. Physical inactivity in children has become a serious problem in children, most of whom travel to school by car. "In 1969, 50% of children went to school on foot. Today, it's 15%," says Rose Bergeron, program support coordinator for Green Communities Canada.

That is all the more unfortunate because the walk to and from school is often the only regular exercise



# CITIES

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children get. Increasingly, the dire prediction of experts is that today's youngsters will be the first generation in centuries to have poorer health and shorter life expectancies than their parents.

Furthermore, according to Green Communities Canada, if just nine families participate regularly in a Walking School Bus over the course of a school year, collectively, they prevent almost 1,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere.

For information, resources, tools and links, telephone 1 877 533 4098 or go to [www.saferoutestoschool.org](http://www.saferoutestoschool.org).

Another key initiative: pressure your local school board to establish, or improve, existing physical education programs for students.

### 3 BE TOUGH ON SMOKING

Insist that your town authorities establish and tightly enforce no-smoking regulations. Second-hand smoke is a serious health hazard for those exposed to it, especially unborn babies and young children. Urge your provincial government to pass and enforce a law prohibiting smoking in vehicles in which young children are travelling.

### 4 DRIVE PESTICIDES OUT OF TOWN

Demand that your provincial government ban the use and sale of pesticides for non-essential purposes. The cosmetic application of pesticides for the maintenance of lawns and playing fields poses a needless risk to human health, especially that of children. "Increasingly, studies are revealing the dangers of pesticides to both human health and the health of the environment," says Lova Ramanitarivo, project director for Équiterre, a Montreal-based organization dedicated to helping Canadian citizens make choices that are ecologically and socially responsible.

A review of epidemiological studies conducted by the Ontario College of Family Physicians reported consistent links between pesticide exposure and serious health conditions such as cancers, reproductive problems and neurological problems. This study showed that the developing bodies of children are particularly vulnerable.



## 5 GIVE PLANTS A JOB

Pressure your employer to install living green plants in your workplace. Air quality in offices is a key element in the health of workers. Poor air quality can trigger unpleasant symptoms such as eye irritation, fatigue, headaches and nasal congestion.

According to research done by environmental scientist Dr. William Wolverton at NASA in Houston, several ornamental plants — including spider plants, gerbera and ficus — are able to clean polluted air and absorb potentially harmful chemicals off-gassed by modern office buildings. These include formaldehyde, benzene, xylene and ammonia.

Also consider asking your employer to install some windows that can be opened to let in fresh air.

## 6 TURN MEAN STREETS GREEN

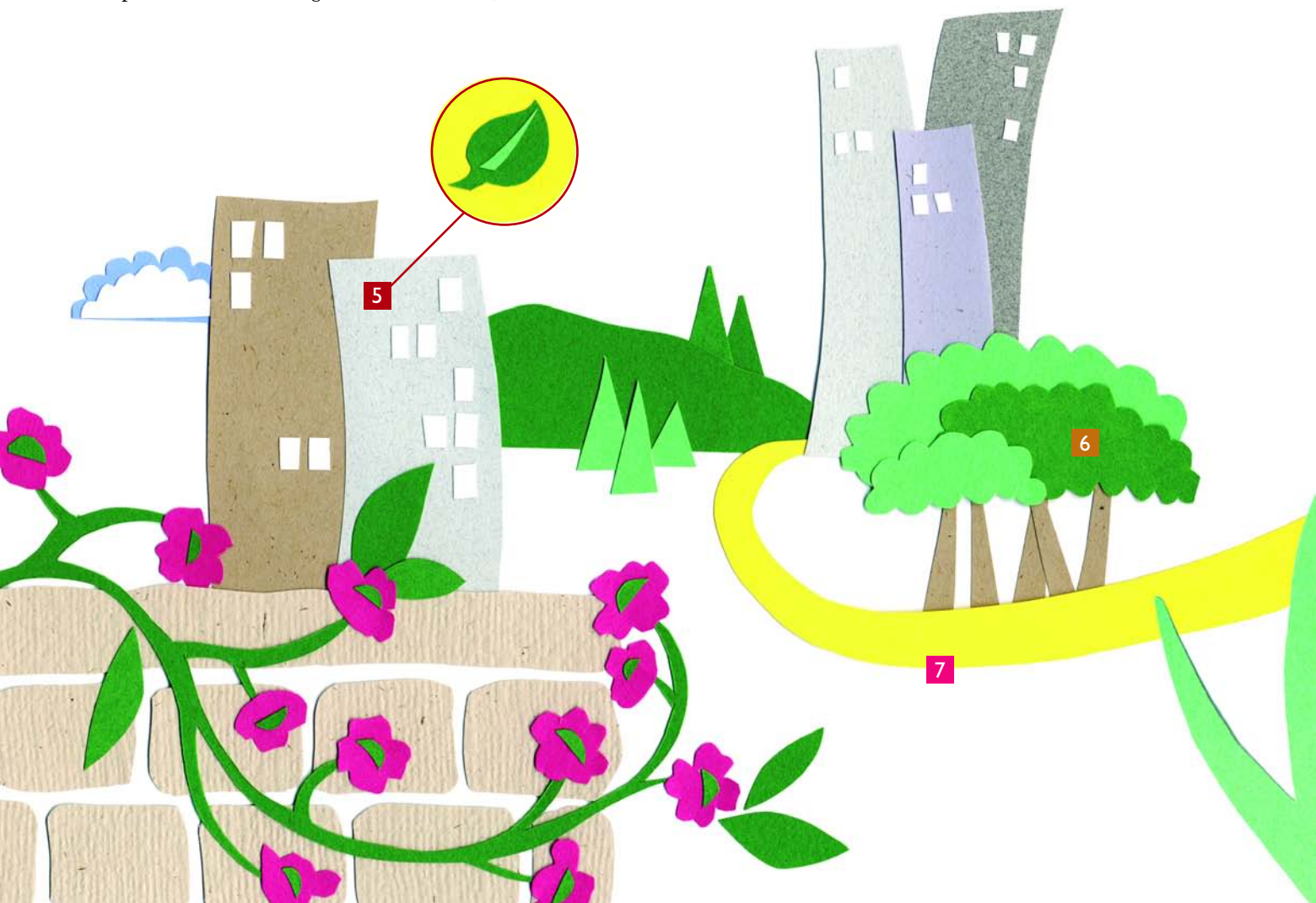
Press your municipal government to plant more trees. Work through Green Streets Canada, the flagship program of Tree Canada, an Ottawa-based municipal forestry program established in 1994. Trees produce oxygen and play a useful role in purifying outdoor air since their leaves absorb a range of atmospheric pollutants. According to Melissa Nisbett, communications

and marketing officer with Tree Canada, a middle-sized tree captures 2.8 kilograms of carbon each year and approximately 225 kilograms over 80 years. Trees also catch dust and particles. In city settings, airborne contaminants are a serious public health problem in terms of respiratory diseases. For more information, call Tree Canada at 1 877 666 1444 or go to [www.treecanada.ca](http://www.treecanada.ca).

## 7 PAVE THE WAY FOR BIKES AND FEET

Lobby your town authorities to set up bicycle paths. According to recent Canadian and Quebec data, 63% of Canadians are not physically active for the 30 minutes to one hour a day recommended by experts. One of the best ways to encourage physical activity is to make it easier to do by providing an accessible infrastructure such as a network of cycling paths. According to Patrick Howe, director of public relations for Vélo Québec, a Montreal-based organization that promotes cycling, “It’s clear that the more facilities there are for cyclists, the more they will use them.”

For those in suburban and rural areas, persuade your community leaders to install sidewalks or walking paths for safe and pleasant strolling.



## 8 PEDAL TO YOUR PLACE OF WORK

Worried about the price of gas, the cost of public transportation, the deteriorating environment and your health? Switch to biking to work. For those who want to try the experience, Vélo Québec has launched Operation Bike to Work and offers online tips and tricks to make the experience a positive one. So positive that you'll want to repeat it as soon as possible. Go to [www.velo.qc.ca](http://www.velo.qc.ca), click on English, then on Bike to Work.

You might also suggest that your employer encourage employee cycling by installing on-site bike racks, showers and changing rooms.

## 9 GIVE PHONES FOR FOOD

Set up *thINK Food/phones for food* boxes in your workplace, school or community for the collection of old cellphones and ink-jet cartridges in support of local food banks across Canada. Under a program founded by the Toronto-based Canadian Association of Food Banks, full collection boxes are sent to a central depot where discarded items are refurbished and sold to consumers. The process generates funds for local food banks and reduces toxic waste.

"The great advantage of this project," says Katharine Schmidt, the association's executive director, "is that people become more aware both of the environment and of hunger."

To date, this program has raised \$500,000 for food banks in communities across the country. Each month, more than 720,000 Canadians access these outlets for help. To get more information or to register, call 1 888 271 3641 or go to [www.think-food.com](http://www.think-food.com).

And while you're at it, safely dispose of other toxic waste products such as expired drugs, car batteries, solvents and aerosol cans. Take them to designated sites.

## 10 PICK UP AFTER PETS

Left on the ground, infectious bacteria or parasites in animal feces — *E. coli*, salmonella and giardia, for example — can end up in your municipality's waterways, making them unsafe for humans and animals. Children playing on the ground can also pick up roundworms from pet droppings. 🐾

