

# THE REFLECTOR

PROMOTING HEALTH FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

A Newsletter from the OHSU Bike Commuter Group

January 2005

## Overweight but Healthy Debate Rages On

Recently, researchers announced that being fit negates the effects of being overweight. Steven N. Blair, who heads the Cooper Institute, a Dallas research foundation focused on physical activity, quipped: "The impression is that everyone who is overweight faces an elevated risk for mortality. That's simply not true." Blair believes the approach to fitness should shift the focus from losing weight to incorporating physical activity into a patient's lifestyle. While most experts agree that exercise is integral to good health, they state that it is misleading to suggest that being physically active while remaining overweight will reduce risk of disease.

The general consensus is that physical activity may reduce the risks of being overweight (ie., diabetes, obesity, stroke, heart disease), but exercise alone is not enough to eradicate the risks. "You really can't override the adverse effects of being overweight merely by being fit," said Arthur Frank, an obesity expert at George Washington University. "You can mitigate it to some extent but not completely."

Louis J. Aronne, president of the North American Association for the Study of Obesity, said, "It's clearly not either fit or fat that's important, but both," he said. "They both carry value." The flip-side of all this is that those who are not overweight may be misled into believing that they don't need to increase their activity. Frank Hu of the Harvard School of Public Health said. "Just because you are thin doesn't mean it's okay to be sedentary."

For more info or to see these quotes in context, see the stories at the following links: [LINK 1](#) [LINK 2](#) [LINK 3](#)

## New Bike Movies

The City of Portland Department of Transportation has created new bike/pedestrian safety movies. They are filmed in vintage black and white so they are worth a look. Click [HERE](#) for movies and click [HERE](#) to see what the City of Portland has to offer for those interested in bicycling.

*It would not be at all strange if history came to the conclusion that the perfection of the bicycle was the greatest incident of the nineteenth century.*

*- Anonymous*

## Straighten Up

You begin the day by crouching over your handlebars during the steep ride up Marquam Hill. You spend the day slumping in front of your computer screen or standing on your feet. Once again you find yourself over your handlebars for the swift ride home.



So it's no surprise if your posture is on a downward spiral. To counteract habitual movements that encourage bad posture, it is important to develop a healthy body awareness and move your body accordingly.

If you notice that your breath is shallow, check your posture. Stooped shoulders inhibit breathing activating your sympathetic nervous system, which increases your stress level and constricts bodily functions. If your spine is straight, you will breathe easier. It is also helpful to remember this while biking. If you drop your abdomen and straighten your back as much as possible while biking, it increases lung capacity and blood flow to big muscles.

The best way to correct bad posture is to incorporate stretching into your daily routine. Many bicyclists will stretch their legs before they begin peddling forgetting that the shoulders, back, and neck tighten during the ride. Stretching should be done throughout the day. Try this:

Begin by stretching both arms to one side of the body, then reverse. Then stretch toward the ceiling. Shoulder rolls and neck rolls also loosen up the upper body and allow the body to relax back into a better posture. To open the chest, look at the ceiling and throw your shoulders back while taking a deep breath. Try to take regular deep breaths as you work and ride to stay relaxed and calm throughout the day.

## Reporting on Simplicity

In December, 25 people embarked on a journey to improve their lives through a series of discussion groups on voluntary simplicity (VS). They began by discussing their motivation to join this group and the common misconceptions of VS.

As they spoke of their reasons for adopting a life of simplicity, it became clear that the core motivator is excess. They are doing too much, they have too much, they spend too much; thus, they crave more quality time, spaciousness, and reduced debt. They hope to move toward a lifestyle that creates room in their lives for those “real” things they crave and ends the cultural drive to excess.

A major misconception encountered when promoting VS is an association with poverty. People assume they are giving up “stuff” which will create emptiness; it is important to realize that VS creates a sense of spaciousness and turns the focus to more important things, such as quiet time, reduced clutter, and money well-spent. One participant mentioned the architect William McDonough who believes we need to focus on bringing good into design while removing the bad.

Another misconception is polarization, that is, people often assume they have to change everything overnight rather than in phases. It’s ridiculous to try and get the average American to buy a compost toilet or sell both cars, so start by selling one car or learn how to recycle better. Simplifying your life should be a gentle process.

A third misconception is that those who choose VS must be freaks or overachievers. Sure, it feels strange at first to carry your own food container to the MacHall cafe, but as more people do it, it will soon feel strange to not have your own container. The goal of Northwest Earth Institute (NWEI) is to create a critical mass of people who have adopted a life of VS. Critical mass is a social term that refers to the minimum number of people it takes to create a culture shift. That number is something like 20% of the population, according to NWEI. So it is important to share these ideas with your co-workers, family members, and friends. Every act counts.

At the second session, the group discussion covered the topic Living with Less. It was interesting to discover that the phrase “living with less” inspires a paralyzing anxiety in people who have not begun simplifying their lives, a mild anxiety in those who have already made a few changes, and relief and content for those who’ve already taken several steps down the path of simplicity. So if you feel intimidated or fearful, take a deep breath and keep going, it gets easier.

Some important things to remember: advertising is designed to make people feel unhappy about themselves in order to sell products that will make them feel better. A big step in curbing your consuming habits is to turn off the T.V. Several group participants talked about how their lives are better without T.V. Sure, they can’t talk about the latest episode of “Friends,” but they have found productive ways of spending their time. Some have taken classes in crafts to learn how to make holiday gifts. Some have taken up gardening or have spent more time making satisfying meals. What is it that you’ve always wanted to do? Maybe now is the time.

### Simple Living Resources

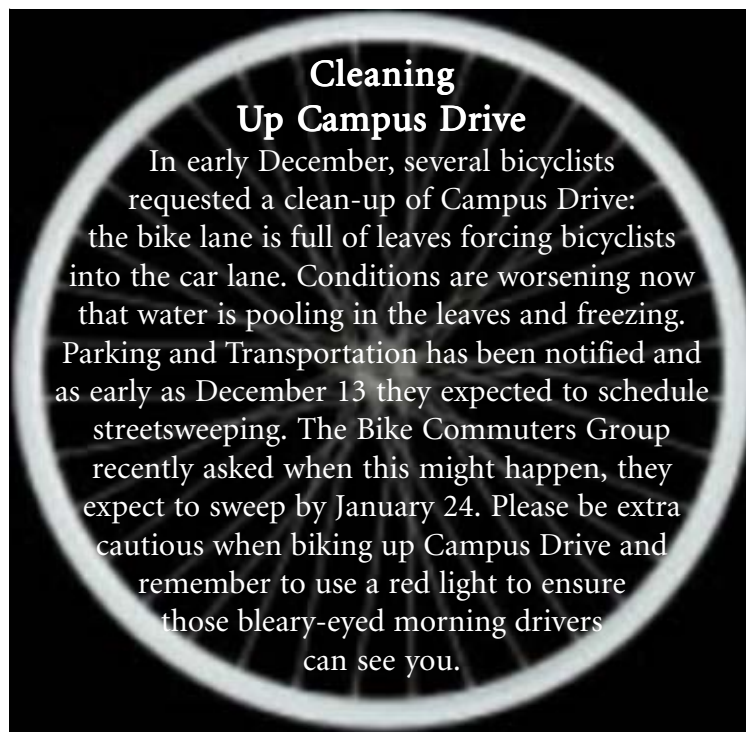
Freecycle allows you to offer things you don’t need to others and find things you need for free. Click [HERE](#) to learn more.

The Simple Living Network seems to have endless resources for freeing yourself through simplicity. Click [HERE](#) to get started.

The Bike Group has an online forum [HERE](#) where a Voluntary Simplicity thread has begun so we can share ideas.

Why buy organic? Find out [HERE](#).

What’s wrong with plastic? Find out [HERE](#).



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BIKE TO WORK!



**The Bike Commuter Group (BCG) promotes bicycling as a healthy mode of transportation that benefits individuals and the environment. For more information about the BCG or to find ways to get involved, contact us at [bike@ohsu.edu](mailto:bike@ohsu.edu) or visit our website at [www.ohsu.edu/bike/](http://www.ohsu.edu/bike/).**