

# PARKS Rx

Your Prescription For Better Health



**BT**  
THE BIRMINGHAM TIMES



# GET ON THE MOVE



1. Get a prescription for Parks Rx from your healthcare provider.



2. Visit [REACHforbetterhealth.com](http://REACHforbetterhealth.com)  
• Enter your Zip code  
• Click

3.  Pick the park that best fits your needs and location.

4.  Exercise in the park and share outcomes with your healthcare provider.



To better serve the residents of Birmingham, the Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center has partnered with community leaders, as well as local organizations, to create a comprehensive coalition to develop and implement Parks Rx.

## Partners key to making Parks Rx work for so many

Times staff report

The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) spearheads the Birmingham REACH for Better Health program a program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). But MHRC Director Mona Fouad, MD, MPH, said community engagement and outside partnerships are the key to making the both the REACH and newly implemented Birmingham Parks Rx programs work.

"We wanted a broader approach because we want to leave footprints to help everyone, not just the individuals who worked on this grant," Fouad said. "If we make changes, we want them to be sustainable after the life of the grant."

The MHRC partnered with numerous community stakeholders and leaders, as well as local organizations to create and introduce Parks Rx. Partners include:

**Freshwater Land Trust.** This nonprofit works to acquire and conserve land to protect Alabama's rivers and streams. The Land Trust also connects and assesses parks and trails in the Birmingham area, creating opportunities for people to get outside and reconnect with nature.

**Jefferson County Department of Health.** Parks RX starts with a conversation between physician

and patient. JCDH healthcare providers developed the Parks Rx prescription and tested it with its English and Spanish-speaking adult and pediatric patients.

**Birmingham Park and Recreation.** In addition to maintaining the city's parks, this organization hosts exercise classes and community events to connect residents to nature and each other.

### OTHER REACH FOR BETTER HEALTH PARTNERS

**United Way of Central Alabama.** Through its Healthy Communities initiative, this organization supports a Safe Routes to Schools program to empower children to walk, bike, or roll to school. United Way also has worked with city government to improve local pedestrian and bike routes.

**YMCA.** This organization reaches out to children and adults via multiple programs aimed at getting folks moving. The YMCA has implemented CATCH, an exercise-and-nutrition-based education program aimed at school children in after-school or summer programs.

**Urban Food Project.** This project, through the economic development organization REV Birmingham, encourages equal food access and food economy in the city. The Urban Food Project provides fresh fruits and vegetables at corner stores in the Kingston and Avondale neighborhoods.



This information is provided for educational purposes and is not to be considered medical advice.

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*"Only 25 percent of American adults get the recommended amount of physical activity, and 29 percent don't engage in any leisure-time physical activity at all. This sedentary lifestyle contributes to an increased incidence of obesity, which leads to chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers."*

MONA FOUAD, MD, PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR FOR REACH, AND PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE UAB DIVISION OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

# Access to greenspaces eases stress, promotes exercise

Times staff report

**M**ost American adults do not get the recommended amount of physical activity and outdoor exercise, which can lead to increased incidence of obesity and other ills, according to a group of local health-care providers seeking ways to improve access to healthy food and increase opportunities for physical activity.

Birmingham REACH for Better Health, a coalition working to reduce health disparities in local communities, has introduced the Parks Rx program to offer fitness opportunities to metro area residents. This effort, led by the University of Alabama at Birmingham Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center (UAB MHRC), is modeled after similar successful initiatives across the U.S. through which health-care providers prescribe exercise for patients and direct them to outdoor places where they can be active. Birmingham's Parks Rx program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), aims to connect patients to close to 100 parks in the city and surrounding communities.



MONA FOUAD

"Only 25 percent of American adults get the recommended amount of physical activity, and 29 percent don't engage in any leisure-time physical activity at all," said Mona Fouad, MD, MPH, principal investigator for REACH, and professor and director of the UAB Division of Preventive Medicine.

"This sedentary lifestyle contributes to an increased incidence of obesity, which leads to chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers," she explained.

Studies have shown that access to the outdoors and green spaces reduces stress, promotes physical activity, and results in a nearly 50 percent increase in exercise. And Parks Rx can help improve that access for Birminghamians.

It starts with a conversation between the patient and healthcare provider. Physicians at the Jefferson County Department of Health already counsel patients on the importance of physical activity, but Parks Rx solidifies the message into something useful and tangible.

After receiving a healthy living prescription, patients are directed to the Parks Rx website, which has an interactive map that enables the user to search

for local parks and greenspaces by ZIP code. The map populates with pinpoints for area parks and includes links to park details, such as amenities, safety, trail lengths, hours of operation, and other information.

"Parks, playgrounds, greenways, and trails can help keep Birmingham residents fit and healthy," said Birmingham

Park and Recreation Director, Kevin Moore. "These spaces also promote community participation and involvement."

The Jefferson County Department of Health launched the Parks Rx program on July 20, 2016, within its pediatric clinics. According to Mark Wilson, MD, Health Officer for Jefferson County,

Parks Rx has been well received by patients, parents of pediatric patients, and physicians.

"A parent from Western Health Center said she would be placing the prescription on her refrigerator as a reminder to her family about daily exercise and healthy eating," said Wilson. "Another parent said she would use the prescription to increase her own physical activity."

Khalilah Brown, MD, a pediatrician at the health department's Central Health Center remarked, "The Parks Rx program empowers children and their families to get involved in the health of the entire family."

Children especially like the ability to use a QR code to identify parks and trails near their homes and schools.

The Freshwater Land Trust, Jefferson County Department of Health, Birmingham Park and Recreation, and UAB MHRC worked together through the

REACH coalition to make Parks Rx a reality in Birmingham after studying similar initiatives from national partners in conservation and health. These partners include the National Land Trust Alliance, Kaiser Permanente, the Institute of the Golden Gate, and others that are part of a larger network focused on reconnecting people to the outdoors to combat health disparities among children and adults.

"We have the perfect recipe for Parks Rx here in Birmingham," said Libba Vaughan, executive director at the Freshwater Land Trust. "Just in the city of Birmingham alone, there are close to 100 parks for people to enjoy. Birmingham is well placed to successfully launch Parks Rx. We have one of the country's leading universities working in preventive medicine and health disparities. We have a county health department dedicated to preventive medicine and encouraging physical activity. And we have a strong conservation ethic in our community that is committed to preserving and promoting outdoor recreation."

After piloting the program this year, the coalition's goal is to expand Parks Rx to other local health providers in the Birmingham area.

UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center provided information for this article.

**PARKS Rx**  
Your Prescription For Better Health

**Rx** REACH FOR BETTER HEALTH

- Maintain normal body weight
- Get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise each week
- Eat meals rich in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products
- Limit added sugar, sodium, saturated fats and total fats in your diet
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Avoid using tobacco

A healthy living initiative led by the  
**UAB MINORITY HEALTH AND HEALTH DISPARITIES RESEARCH CENTER**



Learn more about REACH for Better Health:  
[www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx](http://www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx)  
(205) 975-7904

The Parks Rx literature is also available in Spanish.

**LEARN MORE**

For more info about Parks Rx, visit [www.REACHforbetterhealth.com/parksrx](http://www.REACHforbetterhealth.com/parksrx).





Adam Britt, a dietitian and operations manager of UAB HealthSmart, said that the center's services are free. (SPECIAL TO THE TIMES)

# UAB HEALTHSMART HELPS PEOPLE STAY WELL

BY NATHAN TURNER JR.  
For The Birmingham Times

A high percentage of visitors to UAB HealthSmart in Birmingham are afflicted with diabetes and/or high blood pressure — problems that can lead to kidney and heart ailments, said Adam Britt, a dietitian and operations manager of the wellness center. But there are ways to take control of such issues, he added.

UAB HealthSmart takes a preventive approach in a state where nearly 32 percent of residents are considered obese and 22 percent of adults smoke.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," Britt said. "If you can develop lifestyle changes on the front side, you can avoid problems" like diabetes, high blood pressure, and kidney failure.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) center's comprehensive health evaluations focus on body fat percentage, blood pressure, cholesterol panels, and diabetes screening. Afterward, results are discussed with a nurse, nutritionist, and exercise specialist to set goals and track progress. Additional screenings are provided throughout the year for dental, vision, and respiratory issues.

"Some people who come in are already trying to improve their lives," said Britt, who added that UAB

HealthSmart services are free of charge. The center encourages clients to make appointments. Services include health-risk assessments, as well as nutritional counseling to help clients improve their eating habits. Evaluations are also conducted to help clients learn the components of an effective fitness program, according to UAB HealthSmart literature.

One of the major illnesses among UAB HealthSmart participants is diabetes, which according to the American Diabetes Association (ADA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is growing at an epidemic rate in the U.S. Nearly 30 million Americans are dealing with diabetes and its consequences, which can include heart disease, stroke, amputation, end-stage kidney disease, blindness—and even death.

More than 610,000 Alabamians have diabetes, according to an ADA report. Here are some tips to help you and your loved ones manage the illness:

**Follow your food plan.** Know what, when, and how much you eat; all affect blood-sugar levels.

**Maintain a healthy weight.** Keep off extra pounds by carefully following a food plan and getting plenty of exercise every day.

**Get regular physical activity.** Being more active helps lower blood sugar and burn extra calories. Try 30 to 60 minutes

of light aerobic exercise like walking every day. Talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise plan.

**Check blood-sugar levels.** Your healthcare provider will show you how to use a meter to check your levels.

**Reduce heart disease risks.** People with diabetes are more likely to develop heart disease and have a heart attack or stroke. Talk to your doctor about quitting smoking, controlling blood pressure, and lowering cholesterol.

**Be mindful of overall health.** People with diabetes can get sick quickly and often. Infections are common, particularly in the gums and feet. It is recommended that you brush and floss your teeth daily. Also, check your feet daily for cuts, blisters, or any sign of infection.

**Take your meds.** If you are prescribed insulin, diabetes pills, or other medication, take it exactly the way your health-care provider tells you.

**Work with your healthcare team.** Let all your physicians know if your blood sugar is too high. Have your blood and urine checked. Get eye, foot, and dental exams. Have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Contact UAB HealthSmart at [www.uab.edu/healthsmart](http://www.uab.edu/healthsmart) and [UABHealthSmart@uabmc.edu](mailto:UABHealthSmart@uabmc.edu). 205.996.2304.



Since opening in 2001, UAB HealthSmart has provided one-stop services such as health risk assessment, biometric evaluation, nutrition and exercise counseling to more than 2,800 clients. For those people who came to UAB HealthSmart at least twice, their health improved by 47 percent across all biometric markers.

This article appeared online and in the July 7 edition of The Birmingham Times.



# Healthy eating, bike riding, walking can be a family effort

BY ARIEL WORTHY  
The Birmingham Times

A healthy lifestyle is a family affair, said Khalilah Brown, MD, pediatrician at the Central Health Center at the Jefferson County Department of Health.

"To me, physical activity and healthy lifestyles are a family thing," she said.

One way to involve the entire family is by walking together, according to Brown.

"Parents need exercise, as well," she said. "When families spend time and eat together, their children tend to do better in school."

There are steps that can lead to a better lifestyle, said Brown. For example, families can focus on the 5-2-1-0 Rule:

**5 SERVINGS OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

**2 HOURS OR LESS OF RECREATIONAL SCREEN TIME**

**1 HOUR OR MORE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

**0 SUGARY DRINKS AND MORE WATER**

That suggestion is part of the prescription for better health recommended by the new Parks Rx program. This initiative — led locally by the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) and a slate of community partners — hopes to reconnect Birmingham residents with nature and help them adopt healthier lifestyles. In addition to working with doctors to prescribe better health habits, the program is mapping almost 100 parks and greenspaces in Birmingham where people can go to walk, run, play ball, or participate in other physical activities.

Another step toward a healthy lifestyle, according to Brown: decrease screen time.

"Parents consider TV when they talk about screen time, but they don't consider phones and tablets," she said. "With my



Dr. Khalilah Brown discusses the Parks Rx program at the Jefferson County Department of Health in Birmingham. (MARK ALMOND, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES)

patients, I include screen time at school. So if they have an hour-long computer class, they have only an hour of after-school screen time."

Instead of allowing children to spend

time looking at screens, parents should encourage kids to read books or create art—any activity that will stimulate the mind, said Brown.

Decreasing screen time as a family is

*"I'm not saying give up burgers and fries completely and nibble only on carrot sticks. But instead of buying candy bars and chips, buy apples and bananas so children have healthy food choices when they get hungry."*

**KHALILAH BROWN, MD,  
PEDIATRICIAN, CENTRAL HEALTH  
CENTER AT THE JEFFERSON COUNTY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

also beneficial, she added.

"Oftentimes, family time is when families watch TV together," Brown said. "We suggest that they do things together like walk around a mall or a neighborhood."

To get Birmingham residents moving, the Park Rx program is expanding awareness of greenspaces in the city.

"Now when you drive by, you see people riding bikes, which used to not be the case in Birmingham. You see a more mobile community," said Brown, who said bike riding is another way families can spend time together.

"Children can ride bikes while parents walk," she said. "If you're a parent teaching a kid to ride their bike, you're definitely burning some calories running behind their bike. It's also a good way to spend time with the child."

Another part of the program is cutting out sugary drinks. Some people might find that difficult, but Brown offers a simple suggestion: "If you don't buy it, you can't drink it. If you buy water, kids will drink it."

Healthier food substitutions are also important, said the doctor.

"I'm not saying give up burgers and fries completely and nibble only on carrot sticks," Brown said. "But instead of buying candy bars and chips, buy apples and bananas so children have healthy food choices when they get hungry."

## THE MINORITY HEALTH & HEALTH DISPARITIES RESEARCH CENTER

Since being established in 2002, the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Minority Health & Health Disparities Center (MHRC) has worked diligently to eliminate health disparities in Alabama and across the Southeast. Among the country's poorest communities, many Southeastern neighborhoods have little access to grocery stores and safe streets, and many residents suffer from chronic diseases.

The MHRC is led by Mona Fouad, MD, MPH, a UAB professor and director of the UAB Division of Preventative Medicine, who began work in minority health issues in the early 1990s.

She describes the MHRC as an "umbrella" that provides infrastructure to help address health disparities. The center's priorities, according to Fouad: support science and research efforts; train a pipeline of future physicians; and connect with communities.

Health disparities can be more complex than diagnosing something like the flu or diabetes, Fouad says, because those things typically have a specific cause.

"It takes many scientific disciplines and expertise to address health disparities because the cause is not just one thing," Fouad said. "It is a

complicated issue, involving biological and clinical reasons, as well as socioeconomic, behavioral, and environmental reasons. It takes a more comprehensive approach to deal with that."

The MHRC received a competitive grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2014 to establish the Birmingham REACH for Better Health program, which aims to reach over 100,000 residents. The center also works to support policies that will have a positive impact on larger systems like schools and hospitals, leaving blueprints to help everyone in the future, Fouad said.





Hamidullah Rahmaan poses by a basketball court that is scheduled to be renovated at Stockham Park. (MARK ALMOND PHOTOS, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES)

# FULFILLING A NEED

*Doctors see importance of Parks Rx program as they encourage more physical activity*

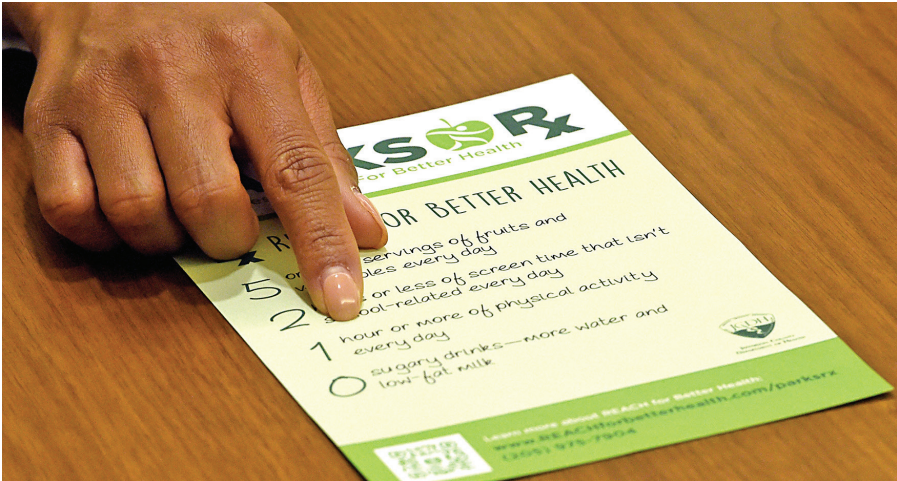
BY MELISSA BROWN  
Special to the Times

Imagine going to your doctor and walking out with two prescriptions: one for medication for high blood pressure or an strep infection and another for 150 minutes of weekly exercise.

We've all heard diet and exercise suggestions from our doctors, but an actual prescription for better health is becoming a reality thanks to a new program called Parks Rx.

This initiative—led locally by the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) and a slate of community partners—hopes to reconnect Birmingham residents with nature and help them adopt healthier lifestyles.

In addition to working with doctors to prescribe better health habits, the



Doctors point out the benefits of the Parks Rx prescription program for better health.

program is mapping close to 100 parks and greenspaces in Birmingham where people can go to walk, run, play ball, or participate in other physical activities.

### A PRESCRIPTION FOR BETTER HEALTH

A Washington, D.C. pediatrician pioneered the country's first Parks Rx program in 2013.

Robert Zarr, MD was concerned about the rates of chronic disorders like obesity and asthma he saw at his clinic, a health center that cares for low-income and immigrant populations. Zarr wanted to give specific activity recommendations to his patients, but that meant he needed a working knowledge of the parks and greenspaces easily accessible by his patients.

That led to mapping the 280 parks in Washington, D.C., which Zarr did with the National Park Service and volunteers from the George Washington University School of Public Health, according to a National Public Radio report. A national Park Rx initiative followed in 2014; it was spearheaded by the National Recreation and Park Association, the National Park Service, and the Institute at the Golden Gate.

At the same time, the UAB MHRC was awarded a competitive \$3 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help reduce a chronic disease health gap in Birmingham's African-American neighborhoods. This led to the Birmingham REACH for Better Health program, a coalition of community partners who work to increase access to healthy food and exercise opportunities. The Birmingham Parks Rx program followed.

"Data show that people tend to respond well to a physician's prescription," said Mona Fouad, MD, MPH director of the UAB Division of Preventive Medicine and the MHRC. "If they say you have to take this pill, you'll take this pill."

So the REACH team developed just that: a prescription to be delivered to healthcare providers recommending more exercise and more fresh foods.



"This prescription is a tangible step," said Mark Wilson, MD Health Officer for Jefferson County. "Patients can carry it home with them and say, 'I can actually do this.'"

#### EXERCISE AND BEYOND

The Parks Rx program, with its prescription for exercise and mapping of close to 100 Birmingham greenspaces, aims to help people in the Magic City take control of their overall health.

The Parks Rx website ([www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx](http://www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx)), where people can enter their ZIP code to search for nearby parks, is working to map Birmingham's parks in a manner that will enable residents to select the spaces that best cater to their needs. For example, according to park profiles on the website, Rotary Trail provides a great walking and running track, but you might want to try Railroad Park for gym and playground equipment.

But Parks Rx isn't simply about getting your heart rate up, Wilson says.

"We've really lost something very important — just getting outdoors and having fun," he said. "This isn't necessarily about putting on your running shoes and using exercise equipment. It's simply about getting outdoors."

Studies show that getting outdoors into nature can have a positive impact on both mental and physical health by reducing stress levels, Wilson said.

The REACH and Parks Rx programs aim to reach kids in certain urban areas, in particular, where they might be living under stress due to issues of poverty or crime.

"The stress hormones rise when people are scared or under duress can lead to poor health outcomes like obesity, we think," Wilson said. "We believe that getting out in nature could help lower those stress hormones and improve mental health as well."

Wilson feels it's important to start connecting children with nature early in their lives, before they get too attached to electronic devices or spending days indoors. Their imaginations will keep them entertained, he said.

"Get them out in the woods, and they'll start playing with sticks and rocks," Wilson said. "Get them outdoors, get them out to a park or trail, and they'll find things to do."

Parks Rx can offer respite to older generations, as well. Birmingham Parks and Recreation Board spokesman Stanley Robinson says city parks can act as a social network and hub for people who may be more isolated at home.

"A social network has developed in a lot of our community parks," Robinson said. "Groups get together to walk daily. For some seniors that is the only social interaction they get that day."

Birmingham Park and Recreation Director Kevin Moore points to a walking group that hits the pavement at East Lake Park as early as 4 a.m. The desire to keep moving and focus on health has led many to establish friendships off the walking track.

"Sometimes you need somebody to check on you," Moore said.

#### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Though the REACH and Parks Rx programs have been spearheaded by the UAB MHRC, Fouad says community partnerships have driven the initiatives forward.

"We had a vision from the beginning, but it's actually exceeded our expectations," Fouad said. "The community



**A Parks Rx sign is shown at the West End Walking Trail. Similar signs will be installed in ten of Birmingham's largest parks.**

engagement itself has been great."

The MHRC has worked alongside Birmingham Park and Recreation, as well as organizations like the Freshwater Land Trust, which is working to cultivate connected and accessible green spaces for Birmingham's residents.

"It makes such a difference to spend time out in the woods. It does something for your whole being," said Memorie English, Freshwater Land Trust communications director. "It's an easy, cost-efficient way to improve your health overall."

Organizations like REV Birmingham's Urban Food project are putting fresh fruits and vegetables in corner stores in the Avondale and Kingston neighborhoods, while the Jefferson County Department of Health liaisons with its physicians who serve those communities.

On a more intimate scale, community stakeholders play a key role in improving the health of their fellow residents. For instance, Brenda Woods of the North Avondale Neighborhood Association has helped communicate the needs and concerns of her community to the UAB MHRC. And Kingston natives and brothers Hamidullah and Hassan Rahmaan have worked for years to revitalize their neighborhood, particularly Stockham Park.

The Rahmaan brothers have been

involved for decades in community leadership and coaching little league teams. Hamidullah said that watching kids playing around unsafe, uncovered sewer drains in Stockham Park several years ago motivated him to help create a safer community space in Kingston.

In partnership with the Kingston Neighborhood Sports Association, the Rahmaans transformed a playground area and a baseball field in Stockham Park. The brothers painted parking lot markers and fence posts themselves, and raised funds for new benches and a scoreboard.

Recently, on a sunny August day, Hamidullah strolled around the park and pointed out the neatly painted concession stand and field lights that were installed in 2015. They hope to install a new basketball court surface soon and revitalize a walking track by adding more lighting.

For the Rahmaans, partnering with REACH and Parks Rx was a no-brainer. They believe nature is important for the physical, spiritual, and intellectual parts of us.

"I'm proud to be a partner with REACH," Hamidullah said. "It's not a coincidence that we came from the earth, and we're going to return to it. Man is not bigger than the earth. He needs the earth."

## HOW IT WORKS

The Birmingham REACH for Better Health and Parks Rx programs aim to reconnect the city's children and adults to nature. Studies show that access to parks and green spaces not only leads to a marked increase in exercise but also reduces stress levels and improves overall mental health.

Parks Rx supports this effort by providing a prescription for better health through improved nutrition and increased physical activity. Doctors and clinics in Birmingham can provide patients with a physical reminder of tangible steps they can take to improve their health, such as:

- **Maintain a normal body weight**
- **Get 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise every week**
- **Eat more fresh produce**
- **Limit sugar, fats, and alcohol in your diet**
- **Avoid using tobacco**

In addition to the Parks Rx prescription, the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) and its partners have created a website that directs patients to their closest park or trail: [www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx/](http://www.reachforbetterhealth.com/parksrx/).

"Parks Rx eliminates the need to get in your car and burn gas and time driving to fancy gyms across town," said UAB REACH Program Director, Theresa Wallace, PhD. "With a couple of clicks, Parks Rx will identify a number of parks to take care of your exercise needs."

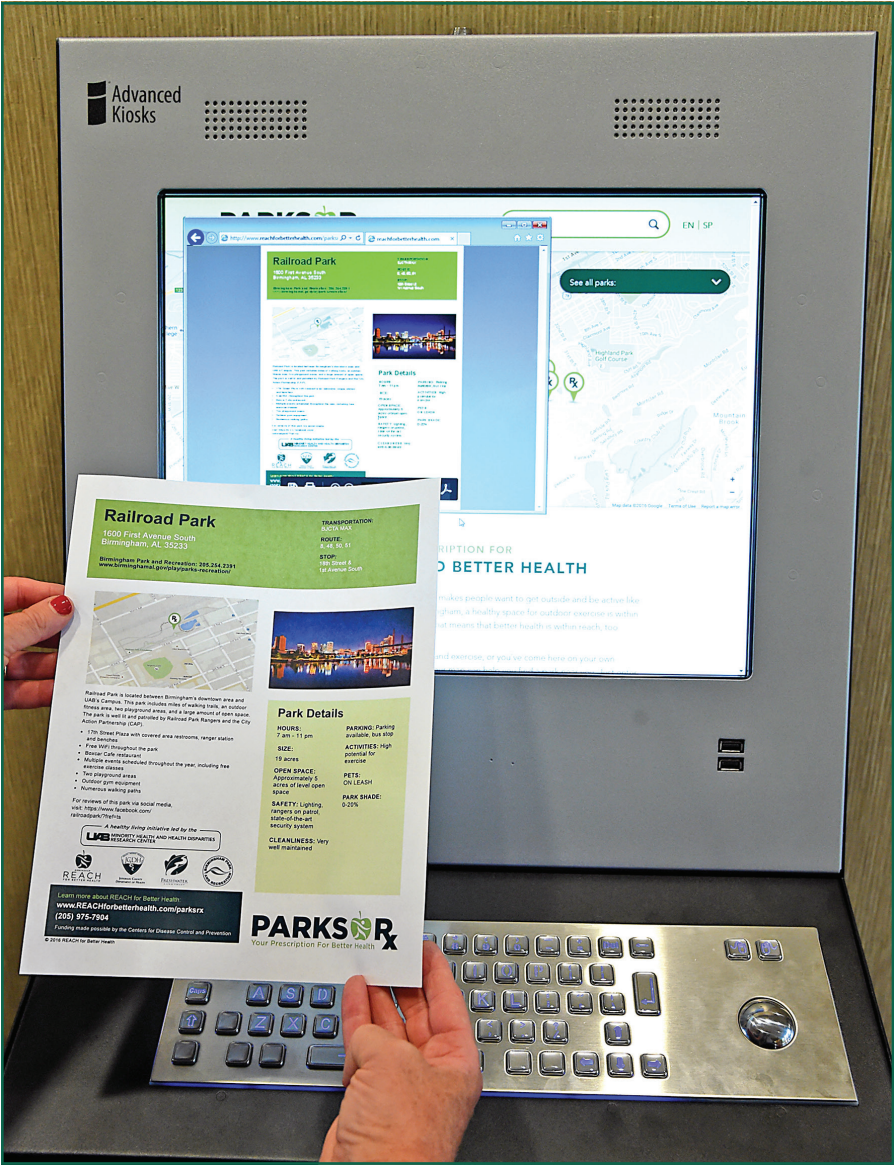
Birmingham currently has close to 100 parks, and new trails are constantly being developed. Parks Rx has mapped dozens of parks for numerous ZIP codes. The program also is in the process of profiling individual parks to provide details like operating hours, parking, and potential activities.

Parks Rx profiles offer valuable information that enables people to tailor park visits to their particular needs. After clicking Avondale Park, for instance, a user can determine which bus routes can be taken to the greenspace. The profiles even mention things like access to charging stations for mobile devices (available on Rotary Trail) or shaded areas on a sunny day (0 to 20 percent in Railroad Park but 40 to 60 percent on Rotary Trail).

"Instead of trying to drown out the background noise of gym music, you can now work out in a park of your choice and listen to the beautiful sounds of nature courtesy of the birds chirping and the cool breeze rustling through the leaves and trees," Wallace said. "There is scientific evidence that communing with nature while exercising can be therapeutic and relaxing, and a stress reliever."



# A COMMUNITY FOR BETTER HEALTH



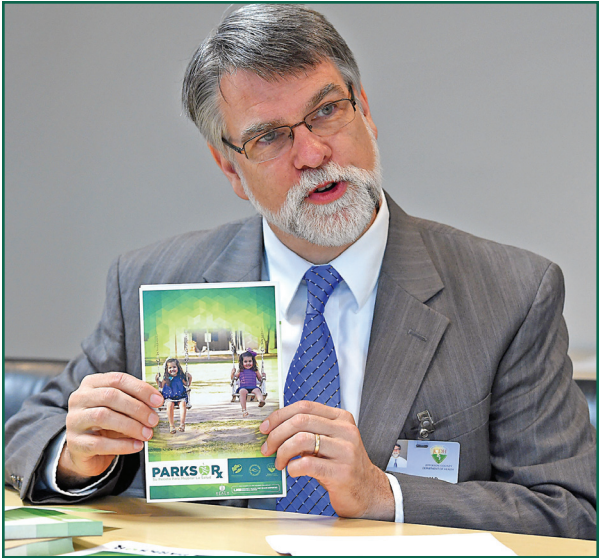
Resources are a click away at the freestanding Parks Rx kiosk at the Central Health Center location of the Jefferson County Department of Health. (MARK ALMOND PHOTOS, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES)



REACH team members pose at the Medical Towers in Birmingham.



Samuel Breuner discusses the history of Stockham Park in Birmingham. Kingston residents have worked for years to revitalize their neighborhood, particularly Stockham Park.



Hamidullah Rahmaan gives a tour of Stockham Park to Dr. Theresa Wynn-Wallace in Birmingham.

Dr. Mark Wilson, Jefferson County health officer, discusses the Parks Rx program, which is also available in Spanish.





## A PRESCRIPTION FOR PLAY

*"Instead of trying to drown out the background noise of gym music, you can now work out in a park of your choice and listen to the beautiful sounds of nature courtesy of the birds chirping and the cool breeze rustling through the leaves and trees."*

**UAB REACH PROGRAM DIRECTOR  
THERESA WALLACE, PHD**



**Kevin Moore, director the Birmingham Park and Recreation, discusses the Parks Rx program during a recent meeting.** (MARK ALMOND, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES)

*"Parks, playgrounds, greenways, and trails can help keep Birmingham residents fit and healthy. These spaces also promote community participation and involvement."*

**KEVIN MOORE, DIRECTOR,  
BIRMINGHAM PARK AND RECREATION**

*"We have the perfect recipe for Parks Rx here in Birmingham. Just in the city of Birmingham alone, there are more than 100 parks for people to enjoy. Birmingham is well placed to successfully launch Parks Rx."*

**LIBBA VAUGHAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
FRESHWATER LAND TRUST**



**Katie Fox, nurse practitioner, discusses the Parks Rx program at the Jefferson County Department of Health in Birmingham.** (MARK ALMOND, SPECIAL TO THE TIMES)

## Parks provide opportunity for exercise, other activities

**BY ARIEL WORTHY**  
The Birmingham Times

**B**irmingham is constantly adding greenspaces, areas designed to encourage healthy lifestyles among its residents. And the more Birminghamians learn about the city's parks, the more likely they are to visit for recreation, say area medical providers.

"I hear a lot of people say they're already going to some of these parks, like Railroad Park, but other parks might be closer to their homes," said Katie Fox, a nurse practitioner at the Jefferson County Department of Health's Eastern Health Center.

That's why the new Parks Rx program is so important, she said.

This initiative — led by the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center (MHRC) and a slate of community partners — hopes to reconnect Birmingham residents with nature and help them adopt healthier lifestyles. In addition to working with doctors to prescribe better health habits, the Parks Rx program is mapping close to 100 parks and greenspaces in Birmingham where people can go to walk, run, play ball, or participate in other physical activities.

Fox encourages her patients to push themselves once they get to the park.

"Often I'll suggest to them, 'Well, if you're walking two laps, next time go for four laps, or attend the yoga classes at Railroad Park,'" she said.

Exercise paired with healthy eating habits can help people manage chronic diseases, as well, according to Fox.

"It helps lower blood sugar and cholesterol," she said. "It's also great for managing stress and, of course, weight. Going outside and simply taking a walk can do great things to prevent chronic diseases."

It's important to continually talk about exercise with patients when they come for appointments, Fox said.

"We definitely have to talk about it every time they come in," she said. "We can't just tell them to do it, we have to give them options and ideas and consider their current lifestyles and schedules."

Another perk about visiting parks: It's a great way for people to learn more about the city, Fox said.

"Birmingham is such a beautiful city, and there are so many parks and trails," she said. "I think programs like Park Rx not only help residents get active but also make them aware of music festivals and other events — all of which contribute to healthier lifestyles and communities."



# City of Birmingham Parks

PARKS Rx CONNECTS BIRMINGHAM RESIDENTS TO PARKS AND GREENSPACES THAT HAVE MODERATE TO HIGH POTENTIAL FOR PEOPLE TO BE ACTIVE OUTSIDE.

**A.G. GASTON PARK**  
(2.77 acres)  
916 Washington Avenue S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35211

**ARTHUR SHORES PARK**  
(2.67 acres)  
1221 19th Street North  
Birmingham, AL 35203

**AVONDALE PARK**  
(36.5 acres)  
4101 5th Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35222

**BARKER PARK**  
(1.39 acres)  
2215 13th Avenue North  
Birmingham, AL 35203

**BIRMINGHAM BOTANICAL GARDENS**  
(67.5 acres)  
2612 Lane Park Road  
Birmingham, AL 35223

**CALDWELL PARK**  
(2.69 acres)  
2500 Highland Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35205

**CENTRAL PARK**  
(8.67 acres)  
4700 Terrace Q  
Birmingham, AL 35208

**CITY PARK**  
(22.13 acres)  
426 Rosewood Street  
Birmingham, AL 35210

**COOPER GREEN PARK**  
(96.53 acres)  
112 Dorothy Drive S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35211

**CRESTLINE PARK**  
(2.7 acres)  
1104-B Kingsbury Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35213

**CRESTWOOD PARK**  
(12.11 acres)  
5400 Crestwood Boulevard South  
Birmingham, AL 35212

**DOROTHY SPEARS PARK**  
(23.72 acres)  
700 13th Avenue West  
Birmingham, AL 35204



**LINN PARK**  
(7.05 acres)  
711 20th Street North  
Birmingham, AL 35203

**MACLIN PARK**  
(7.18 acres)  
2701 F.L. Shuttlesworth Drive North  
Birmingham, AL 35217

**MARCONI PARK**  
(3.71 acres)  
630 25th Street North  
Birmingham, AL 35203

**MCALPINE PARK**  
(8.34 acres)  
701 11th Street  
Ensley, AL 35218

**MCLENDON PARK**  
(68.22 acres)  
400 Graymont Avenue West  
Birmingham, AL 35204

**MEMORIAL PARK**  
(7.18 acres)  
524 6th Avenue South  
Birmingham, AL 35205

**MINNIEVILLE PARK**  
(2.57 acres)  
5500 14th Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35224

**NORTH BIRMINGHAM PARK**  
(13.42 acres)  
3501 28th Street North  
Birmingham, AL 35207

**NORWOOD PARK**  
(6.55 acres)  
1420 28th Street North  
Birmingham, AL 35234

**PATTON PARK**  
(21.1 acres)  
1200 Sipsey Street  
Birmingham, AL 35207

**PRATT CITY PARK**  
(15.82 acres)  
1331 3rd Street  
Pratt City, AL 35214

**RAILROAD PARK**  
(19 acres)  
1600 1st Ave.  
Birmingham, AL 35233

**DOWNEY PARK**  
(10.31 acres)  
6800 Dublin Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35212

**EAST BROWNVILLE PARK**  
(4.58 acres)  
3913 Felix Avenue S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35221

**EAST LAKE PARK**  
(60.22 acres)  
8101 4th Avenue North  
Birmingham, AL 35206

**EAST THOMAS PARK**  
(.38 acres)  
538 5th Street West  
Birmingham, AL 35204

**ECHO HIGHLANDS PARK**  
(12.86 acres)  
1800 Indian Summer Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35215

**ELDER STREET NATURE PARK**  
(37.12 acres)  
311 Elder Street  
Birmingham, AL 35210

**ELDORADO PARK**  
(6.23 acres)  
930 Eldorado Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35235

**ENSLEY PARK**  
(30.8 acres)  
2800 Avenue K  
Birmingham, AL 35218

**ERSKINE HAWKINS**  
(1.19 acres)  
1900 Ensley Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35218

**ERSKINE RAMSAY PARK I-A**  
(.84 acres)  
3600 Montclair Road  
Birmingham, AL 35213

**FOUNTAIN HEIGHTS PARK**  
(14 acres)  
1101 15th Avenue North  
Birmingham, AL 35204

**GEORGE WARD PARK**  
(83.73 acres)  
1901 Greensprings Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35205

**GERMANIA PARK**  
(20 acres)  
3000 Pearson Avenue S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35211

**GRAYSON PARK**  
(4.03 acres)  
1041 Five Mile Road  
Birmingham, AL 35215

**GREENWOOD PARK**  
(36.14 acres)  
1632 Tallapoosa Street  
Birmingham, AL 35207

**HIGH ORE TRAIL**  
600 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr.  
Midfield, AL 35228

**HOOPER CITY PARK**  
(11.82 acres)  
3901 4th Street West  
Birmingham, AL 35207

**INGLENOOK PARK**  
(5.91 acres)  
4016 37th Avenue North  
Birmingham, AL 35217

**KELLY INGRAM PARK**  
(3.68 acres)  
500 17th Street North  
Birmingham, AL 35203

**LEARNING TREE PARK**  
(2.45 acres)  
4831 Court V  
Ensley, AL 35208



**RED MOUNTAIN PARK**  
(1,500 acres)  
2011 Frankfurt Dr.  
Birmingham, AL 35211

**RHODES PARK**  
(3.2 acres)  
2800 Highland Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35205

**ROOSEVELT CITY PARK**  
(7.68 acres)  
5904 Higan Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35228

**ROTARY TRAIL**  
(4 linear blocks)  
20th to 24th St. along 1st Ave.S  
Birmingham, AL 35203

**RUFFNER MOUNTAIN  
NATURE PRESERVE**  
(1038 acres)  
1012 81st St. South  
Birmingham, AL 35206

**RUSHTON PARK**  
(4.37 acres)  
3000 Highland Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35205

**SPRING WATER PARK**  
(6.74 acres)  
1400 Midland Avenue  
Birmingham, AL 35224

**STOCKHAM PARK**  
(6.52 acres)  
4221 8th Avenue North  
Birmingham, AL 35212

**TOM BRADFORD PARK**  
(165.75 acres)  
1 Bradford Park Drive  
Birmingham, AL 35234

**VULCAN PARK**  
(10 acres)  
1701 Valley View Dr.  
Birmingham, AL 35209

**VULCAN PARK TRAIL**  
(8.56 acres)  
1852 Richard Arrington Jr.  
Boulevard South  
Birmingham, AL 35209

**WAHOUMA PARK**  
(16.13 acres)  
216 71st Street North  
Birmingham, AL 35206

**WEST BROWNVILLE  
PARK**  
(1.84 acres)  
5201 Jefferson Avenue S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35221

**WEST END WALKING  
TRAIL**  
(.22 acres)  
633 Cotton Avenue S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35211

**WIGGINS PARK**  
(18.4 acres)  
3301 Jefferson Avenue S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35221

**WOODWARD PARK**  
(8.8 acres)  
1215 McMillan Avenue S.W.  
Birmingham, AL 35211

**WYLAM PARK**  
(13.43 acres)  
1101 Detroit Street  
Birmingham, AL 35224

Source: City of Birmingham Park and  
Recreation Department.



Health officials say it was essential to translate Park Rx materials into Spanish so all patients, regardless of ethnicity, can benefit.

## Spanish-language health material available for area residents

Times Staff Report

Recognizing the growing community of Spanish-speaking residents in Jefferson County, the Birmingham REACH for Better Health team developed the Parks Rx healthy-living prescription program in both English and Spanish. Adult and pediatric prescriptions, as well as a brochure, the website, and close to 100 detailed park fliers are currently available in Spanish.

"Jefferson County has experienced tremendous growth in diversity," said Carlos Torres-Sanchez, international program manager of the Jefferson County Department of Health. "Having Parks Rx available in Spanish expands the window of opportunity for our neighbors who can't speak English to have meaningful access to this program."

The Spanish-language material is important because it helps with "nuances of the culture, nuances of the individual backgrounds that affect how people understand public health," Torres-Sanchez added.

Birmingham REACH for Better Health, a coalition working to reduce health disparities in local communities by increasing access to healthy food choices and opportunities for physical activity, will

introduce the Parks Rx program to Birmingham at a press conference on Thursday, Sept. 22, at 3 p.m. in Avondale Park.

Bryn Manzella, director of quality improvement at the Jefferson County Department of Health, said 3.9 percent of Jefferson County residents identify themselves as Hispanic, Latino, or Latina.

"Many of those individuals are more comfortable from a health literacy perspective in Spanish, and some do not speak English at all," Manzella said. "Every person in Jefferson County is valued by the department of health, so we want to make our program as widespread as we can."

Health officials say it is essential to translate materials into Spanish so all patients, regardless of ethnicity, can benefit. The Jefferson County Department of Health has a public health language coordinator and a team of interpreters.

"We want to make sure everyone has access to all of our programs and initiatives because that is what ensures the health of the [overall] community," Torres-Sanchez said. "When it comes to the public health of the community, it's not about a particular individual; it's about making sure that every group within the community participates."

For the community to be healthy, he said, "everybody in the community must be healthy."

*"Jefferson County has experienced tremendous growth in diversity. Having Parks Rx available in Spanish expands the window of opportunity for our neighbors who can't speak English to have meaningful access to this program."*

**CARLOS TORRES-SANCHEZ, INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER  
OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

### EXERCISE FACT:

Need to blow off some steam after a stressful day? A brisk 30-minute walk can help. Physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed. Regular exercise can boost your confidence and improve self-esteem.







# Getting healthy is a walk in the park.

Parks Rx is your quick and easy path to fresh air, physical activity and better health. With more than 100 parks and trails in Birmingham and more being built all the time, there's an outdoor space right around the corner, and we're here to help you find it. Take that first step toward a healthier you.

Visit [www.REACHforbetterhealth.com/parksrx](http://www.REACHforbetterhealth.com/parksrx) today.

Consult your healthcare provider before beginning any exercise program.

**PARKS Rx**  
Your Prescription For Better Health

A healthy living initiative led by the

**UAB** MINORITY HEALTH AND HEALTH DISPARITIES RESEARCH CENTER



Made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention