

# After a long winter, it's time to rediscover the joys of walking outdoors

*Let's take a quick refresher on how to be a good pedestrian AND how to be a pedestrian-friendly driver*

**T**oday's column is being written with a spiritual goal in mind.

I'm going to *will* it to be spring. I'm going to use the power of visualization, focusing my attention on what will be, not what's happening. And since what's happening is cold, miserable weather, I'm visualizing my rubber boots off. I bet you are, too.

So, now that we have shifted our thinking (and closed our blinds) and are pretending it's warm and sunny outside, what are we visualizing ourselves doing? And don't visualize yard work, let's think about *fun* things to do!

Like taking a walk, a jog, or a blade around the park. Like taking the kids outside *without* spending a half hour struggling to get them into their snowsuits. Like hitting the road and getting those legs moving again!

Need some help? I know, the whole concept of *willingly* walking outside can be a bit intimidating after six months of winter, so try this imagery: you're



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outside in blazing sunshine, breathing fresh air scented with flowers and new grass. You're meandering through a quaint shopping area, strolling back and forth across the boulevard from the coffee joint to the pottery shop. Your kids are gleefully dashing from storefront to storefront, and your well-behaved dog (I said this was a visualization) dutifully trots behind.

## Impossible scenario

OK, quit visualizing. Now, think about the above exercise and tell me which part is absolutely impossible to recreate in "real life."

You've got it. There's no way, ever, that you could casually move in *any* manner back and forth across a

boulevard without taking your life in your hands.

Pedestrians (in case you forgot what they're called) and motorists can get along, can "share the fantasy," but often do not. There's a simple reason why.

## We get lazy

Some pedestrians move in precisely the manner I described above: wandering about, with no regard for traffic regulations, traffic flow, or driver blood pressure.

And, some drivers are equally guilty of ignoring pedestrians, good citizens at crosswalks and bad citizens everywhere else. There are rules, folks, and if both camps play along, spring and summer – if they ever get here – will be enjoyable for all.

So, in the interest of keeping the peace, here are "the rules":

## Pedestrians

Always watch for turning vehicles. Having had the legal right to cross won't make your wounds heal any faster.

Cross only at intersections whenever possible, preferably at those controlled by signs or traffic control signals.

Before stepping off the curb, make sure that all vehicles have stopped for you and that all drivers see you. Don't step out until you make eye contact, vehicle by vehicle.

Brighten up the night: flashlights, reflective clothing or tape can make a big difference.

## Drivers

Slow down when driving through residential neighbourhoods.

When making a left or right turn, give way to pedestrians crossing the road. They have right of way, you don't.

Pay attention; the driver slowing ahead could be reacting to a pedestrian.

Never pass a vehicle stopped at a crosswalk or pedestrian corridor.

The elderly are particularly at risk, as they can experience physical changes that affect how they cross streets, including decreased mobility

and reaction time, hearing loss, and declining vision.

Be aware of children, too. Their field of vision is one-third narrower than an adult's and they can't determine the direction of sounds. They don't see the car, and they don't hear it coming. They often believe headlights are "eyes" and the car can "see" them. They are easily distracted, and prone to sudden movement. Trust me, I have one of them in my house and "sudden movement" is a ridiculous understatement.

That's it for this week. Until next week, stay focused: think sunshine, think anything but rain mixed with snow. And be **RoadWise**

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