

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

For Exercise, Just Try Walking

While some fitness enthusiasts relentlessly seek out the latest, trendiest exercise crazes, many others are returning to good, old-fashioned walking to help them feel great and get into shape. Whether enjoying the wonder of nature, or simply the company of a friend, walking can be a healthy, invigorating experience. And thanks to its convenience and simplicity, walking just might be right for you too.

Benefits of Walking

You don't need to become a member of an expensive gym to go walking. And except for a good pair of walking shoes, it requires virtually no equipment.

A sedentary lifestyle has a debilitating influence on people's health as they age, therefore exercise is imperative. Walking accomplishes all of the following and more:

- Improves cardiovascular endurance
- Tones muscles of the lower body
- Burns calories: about 80 if walking 2 miles per hour, and about 107 if walking 4.5 miles per hour
- Reduces risk of heart disease

Selecting Shoes

The first item of business when beginning your walking program is to select the right pair of shoes. Too many people choose fashion over function when purchasing running shoes, not realizing that poor-fitting shoes can do more than hurt their stride; they can also lead to pain throughout the body.

- Make sure the shoes you purchase fit properly. The balls of your feet should rest exactly at the point where the toe end of the shoe bends during walking.
- Select shoes with plenty of cushioning in the soles to absorb the impact.



- Shop for sneakers at the end of the day or after a workout when your feet are generally at their largest. Wear the type of socks you usually wear during exercise.
- When trying on shoes, be sure to wear them for at least 10 minutes at the store.

Once you have purchased a pair of shoes, don't walk them into the ground. While estimates vary as to when is the best time to replace old shoes, most experts agree that between 300 and 500 miles is optimal.

Getting Started

Walking just 12 minutes every other day can offer important health benefits. But in order to increase your longevity, try to eventually work up to 30 minutes, five days per week. Experts generally agree that to be

considered “active,” adults should try to take 10,000 steps each day. Wearing a pedometer is an easy way to track your progress.

The following tips can help you get started on your walking regimen:

- Move your arms freely, in coordination with the opposite leg.
- Don't stoop your head or look down as you walk. This will challenge the normal forward curve of your neck, which, in turn, will cause you to carry your weight improperly.
- Don't carry weights or dumbbells while walking. They're better used as a separate part of your exercise regimen.
- Expect a little soreness in the thighs and calves for the first week or two. If you experience more than soreness, check with your doctor or chiropractic.
- Walk briskly, with “purpose.” Simply sauntering, while relaxing and enjoyable, is not an effective form of cardiovascular exercise.

Consult your doctor before beginning any exercise program. Begin slowly with a walk of perhaps half of a mile at a pace that does not cause discomfort. Continue this for about two weeks, then start to increase the pace and length of time walking. Eventually – depending on your age – you can build your “target” heart rate/pulse to either 120 beats per minute or, if younger, as many as 140 beats per minute. For the average adult, a heart rate of 120 beats per minute would require walking at about 3 miles per hour, while a heart rate of 140 beats per minute would require a pace of 4 miles per hour.

Proper Hydration

Drink 10 eight-ounce glasses of water a day to help keep the kidneys active, dilute and remove toxins from the body, and replace lost fluids. (Coffee, tea, soft drinks and alcohol are diuretics/dehydrators. Don't substitute them for water.) If you perspire during walking, you may need to drink even more.

Walking Surfaces

Some walking surfaces are better than others on your musculoskeletal system.

- Walking on a cushioned or rubberized track is ideal, because the cushioning of this type of track absorbs most of the impact of your walking. Many recreation centers offer this type of track free of charge.
- Grass is another good surface, but watch out for hidden dips or holes in the ground.
- Walking on a surface with no give, such as concrete or a mall floor, is not your best choice, because this type of surface will not absorb much of the impact your body will experience. If you do choose to walk on such a surface, be extra careful to select highly cushioned shoes.

Pain and Injury

While you may experience pain or injury in a particular area, such as a knee or a hip, the root of the problem may lie somewhere else. Injuries of this nature are not regional, or isolated, but systemic. A problem in the foot or ankle can create an imbalance in every step, leading to discomfort or injury that moves to the knees, hips, low back, or elsewhere. If you suffer from pain beyond typical muscle soreness, your doctor or chiropractic can diagnose and treat your pain or injury and get you back into the swing of your walking routine. Your doctor or chiropractic can also help customize a wellness program that is right for you and has the expertise to help keep you in the mainstream of life. ■

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For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at www.acatoday.org or call 800-986-4636.

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