



## Counting steps can be the beginning of a 'Healthier Tomorrow'



Walking is one of the easiest types of exercise. Because of all the modern conveniences today (cars, buses, computers, cell phones, remote controls, etc.), people walk less and sit more. For some, walking can be and is hard work.

### • Will Walking Benefit My Health?

Some think that exercise has to be demanding to have health benefits. Researchers have shown that this is not the case. Some of the many health benefits of walking include weight control, better sleep, more energy, lower risk for heart disease, and blood pressure/diabetes control. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services suggests that a healthy way to meet physical activity guidelines is working up to walking 10,000 steps each day (approximately 5 miles). Remember that everyone is different so walking fewer than 10,000 steps a day could be enough for you.

### • Should I Check with My Doctor Before I Begin a Walking Program?

It is important to always talk with your doctor before starting a walking program or any other form of physical activity. Your doctor would be able to give you the best advice about if you should be walking and how often. Also, if you are not used to walking for exercise, set your own goals and work each week to achieve what you are able to do. Possible goals to set for yourself are to increase the number of steps you take in a day, increase your speed when you walk, or change up your routine to challenge yourself more.

### • Where Should I Walk and With Whom?

Find places to walk that are safe and nearby your home. Great places to walk are around your neighborhood, local mall, gym, and park. Walking inside your home is a good idea too. You can also invite your family, neighbors, and friends to walk with you for support and someone to talk to. Walk during the daylight hours or with another person for safety.

### • How Can I Keep Track of My Walking?

There are many ways to count your daily number of steps:  
\* Keep a journal in your pocket to track of the number of steps you take and write it down. Also keep track of where you walk and how you feel while you are walking.

\* Use time. For instance, if you walk for 5 minutes, count how many steps you normally take in 5 minutes and multiply the steps by the amount of total time.

\* Use a pedometer. A pedometer is a small piece of equipment that clips onto your waistband or belt that counts the number of steps you take as you walk, jog, or run. Many sporting good stores, retail stores, and organizations offer pedometers at a low cost or sometimes even for free.

\* Join a walking program. Many organizations promote walking programs in the community. Pedometers are often distributed to participants so that they can count the number of steps that they walk each day. Walking programs have been created to motivate people to get up and walk. By joining a community program, it gets you out of the house to socialize and meet other people while at the same time benefiting your health.

### • Tips to Start a Walking Program

\* Go out and get yourself a new pair of walking shoes and socks, so your feet are comfortable while you walk.

\* In the winter, remember to wear gloves and the appropriate clothes to stay warm. In the summer, remember to wear a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen.

\* Drink plenty of liquids before, during, and after you walk to stay hydrated.

\* Also, remember to warm-up your muscles by slowly walking and doing flexibility exercises before you start your walking routine. Afterwards remember to cool-down and stretch to relax your muscles.

\* Remember to listen to your body. If you feel any pain or unusual discomfort, stop walking immediately and contact your doctor.

### • Suggestions to Increase Your Steps Each Day

\* Park your car farther from the store entrance.

\* Take the stairs instead of the elevator, if you are able to.

\* Get off the bus at an earlier stop to walk to your destination.

\* Get up to change the channel instead of using the remote control.

\* March in place while you are watching TV.

\* While you talk on the phone, walk around the room.

Walking can be beneficial to your health. Make walking a fun activity by inviting friends and family along. Walking together can lead to a Healthier Tomorrow.

*This column was written by Lisa Magilson, Student Intern at the Center for Healthy Aging (CHA). CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Center*

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