

Stepping Out! Walking: A Sport for all Ages

Have you ever thought you were too out of shape, too busy, or too old for active living? Wish you could find an easy way to stay fit or lose weight while avoiding the costs and time commitments of your local gym? You're in luck! The sport you've been searching for is walking.

Walking can be done by people of any age, anytime, and anywhere, with minimal risk of injury, if done correctly. Aside from a sturdy pair of walking shoes, this pastime is virtually cost-free. Still, many people consider walking to be wimpy and unglamorous. They may not realize that brisk walking burns as many calories per mile as jogging [3], while placing less stress on the body's joints. In addition, walking is as effective as running in strengthening the bones and reducing the risk of diseases like osteoporosis [10].

Additional beneficial effects of walking are well documented. Walking conditions the heart and lungs, reducing the risk of heart disease and strokes. It has been shown to lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and even blood sugar levels [9]. Some studies have linked walking to reduced disability and reliance on pain-killers in people suffering from arthritis of the knees, low back conditions [12, 13], and chronic pain syndromes [6]. But that's not all! Regular aerobic exercise, such as walking, has been linked to improved function of the immune system [8] and reduced risk of certain cancers, including colon and breast cancer [5].

If that's not reason enough to get stepping out, walking also relieves tension and stress! In a recent study of over 400 people suffering from depression, regular walking reduced depressive symptoms and improved the quality of life [4, 11]. Even new mothers experiencing post-partum depression significantly reduced their depressive symptoms by taking part in a stroller-walking group three times weekly for twelve weeks [1].

Why Walk? Regular Walking Promotes the Following:

1. Weight and fat loss
2. Lower blood LDL cholesterol levels
3. Lower blood pressure
4. Decreased risk of developing diabetes
5. Improved mood and reduced symptoms of depression
6. Decreased symptoms of chronic pain syndromes, including fibromyalgia
7. Decreased pain and disability due to arthritis of the knees and low back conditions
8. Reduced risk of cancers, including colon and breast cancer
9. Improved functioning of the immune system
10. Decreased risk of osteoporosis

So, how much walking do you have to do in order to reap these benefits? Most studies agree that walking for thirty minutes three to four times a week is sufficient [2]. That may be as simple as walking to work in the morning or taking a brisk stroll during your lunch hour! But what if thirty consecutive minutes is too much for you? No problem! Research also shows that three short bouts of brisk walking for ten minutes accumulated throughout the day are as effective as a continuous thirty minute walk in reducing the risks of cardiovascular disease and improving your mood [7]!

But how fast should you go? General guidelines suggest you should be able to carry on a conversation comfortably throughout your walk. Remember to pace yourself and slow down if you experience significant shortness of breath or pain.

Where should you walk? Your route can be as simple as a brief stroll to the corner store. Walks through local parks and ravines, may provide interesting scenery, but remember to consider the safety of your route as well as its terrain, since many hills or stairs will increase the difficulty of your walk. During the winter months when sidewalks and pathways may be frozen, Canadians of all ages enjoy "mall walking" in large shopping centres on icy days.

Regardless of your age, fitness level, or schedule, it's easy to make time for walking. If you're interested in getting involved, contact your local community centre for walking programs in your neighborhood, or better yet, start your own walking group with other people who have similar goals.

Ways to Incorporate Walking into Your Daily Routine:

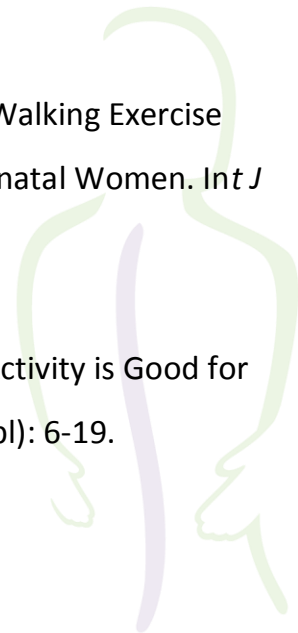
1. Walk to the store instead of driving.
2. If driving, park further from your destination and make a point to walk to it.
3. Walk part of the way or all the way to or from work or school.
4. Use the stairs instead of elevators or escalators.
5. Walk during your breaks or lunch hour.
6. Walk your dog (or borrow a friend's dog).
7. Take a walk in the evening after dinner to burn more calories.
8. Make walking a social event by arranging to meet with friends for a stroll.
9. Push your child in a stroller or wheelchair bound friend or relative.
10. Make a point to get up and walk around the house or office for 5 minutes every hour.

Get started on the right foot! It's as easy as finding a comfortable pair of walking shoes and plotting a route. Remember to set a few minutes aside to stretch the muscles of your calves, thighs, and back both before and after walking. If you experience pain or difficulty breathing when walking, or if you have concerns about starting a walking program, consult a healthcare practitioner, such as a chiropractor.

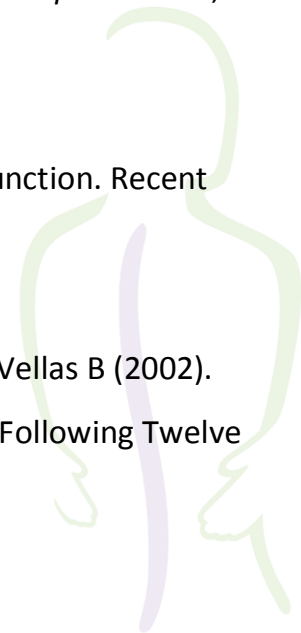
Doctors of chiropractic are specialists trained to treat and prevent disorders of the spine and extremities. They also offer gentle hands-on treatment to the joints and soft tissues, which has been shown to improve mobility and function. Your chiropractor will be able to help you design a walking program suited to your particular needs and can advise you about appropriate stretches and footwear for walkers.

References:

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