

## **Walking Improves Wellness**

Regular walking is the safest, simplest way to increase your fitness level and easier on the joints than other aerobic endeavors. Walking stimulates the cardiovascular system, improves many medical conditions or limitations, strengthens bones, reduces stress and burns calories effectively. In one study, women who walked briskly (3-4 miles per hour) at least three hours per week cut their risk of heart attack and stroke by more than half.



## **Advantages of Walking**

Requires no special equipment  
Requires only a comfortable pair of shoes and casual attire  
Is inexpensive, convenient  
Requires no special skill  
Has minimal risk of injury  
Has the lowest dropout rate of all other exercise programs  
Is universally enjoyable among all ages

Now, new research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) reports that walking regularly may help preserve mental sharpness as well. Experts suspect that better cardiovascular health promotes improved blood flow to the heart and brain and preserves the connections between brain cells.

Unfortunately, many would-be pedestrians never lace up their sneakers to reap the benefits of regular walking as part of their fitness regimen. Some stumble over the misperception that walking isn't rigorous enough to do any good while others get tripped up by excuses that they simply can't fit it into a busy schedule or it's too monotonous.

How much is enough to make a difference? Here are some tips that may help you get a walking program off on the right foot:

1. If you are new to regular walking, check with your physician first, start slowly, and build up your time in action gradually. Remember it's important to exercise at your own pace.
2. If you want to build an overall health benefit, accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days. You can accomplish that goal with a single 30-minute brisk walk, several shorter walks that add up to 30 minutes or do a short walk in combination with other physical pursuits like yard work, swimming or energetic vacuuming.
3. If your goal is to lose weight, think LSD-short for Long Slow Distance. Strive for 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous activity most days.
4. You can crank up the cardio benefits by swinging your arms faster and your legs will follow in sync. Vary intensity using fast and slow intervals or uphill walking.
5. Take the "Talk Test" to measure intensity. You should be able to carry on a conversation as you move briskly along. If you can belt out the Star Spangled Banner, pick up the pace; if you're too out of breath to talk comfortably, slow down the pace. Or take Harry Truman's sage advice: "Just walk as if you have some place to go." Exercise at your own pace.
6. Light stretching after muscles are thoroughly warmed up may improve performance and reduce risk of injury.

