



How Walking Can Extend Life

Even Minimal Walking Offers Health Benefits

You don't have to run or bike intensively to get the health advantages of regular exercise. A new study by the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (AJPM) showed that 120 minutes or less of moderate-intensity walking each week can add longevity to your life. 120 minutes? That's less than 18 minutes a day!

Exercise has long been associated with a lower risk for diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. But this study is the first to separate walking from other types of exercise, and found that walking extends life in older people. Even those who walked less than the minimum recommended levels lived longer than inactive people. So, that means any amount of walking is better than none.

The Benefits of Walking

The best thing about walking is that it is easy to do. It's gentle on your joints and it's free. Here are some important benefits of walking:

- Prevent or manage heart disease by strengthening the heart, improving circulation, reducing bad (LDL) cholesterol and increasing good (HDL) cholesterol.
- Reduce the risk of stroke and prevent or manage high blood pressure.

- Prevent or manage type 2 diabetes.
- Strengthen bones and muscles, and improve balance and coordination.
- Improve digestion.
- Lighten mood.
- Reduce fatigue, increase energy and improve sleep.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

More About Joints

Most of our joints get their 'nutrition' from joint, or synovial, fluid that is circulated when we move. The more movement, the more nutrients go to the joints, and the less sore or stiff they feel. If you have arthritis, moving may be tough after periods of inactivity but it is movement that helps to protect joints from further deterioration and eases pain. Walking also helps build muscles that support the joints.

Mental Acuity

A study of 6,000 women 65 years or older performed at the University of California, San Francisco showed that age-related memory loss was lower among those who walked more. Women who walked 2.5 miles a day had a 17% loss in memory, in con-

Walking Improves Mood

A study* showed that the more steps a person took in a day, the lighter their mood. When you walk, the body releases endorphins, which give a sense of euphoria and reduce perceptions of pain. Whether you've had a bad day or are managing depression, a daily walk can boost your mood.

*Study by California State University, Long Beach

trast to a 25% decline among those who walked less than a mile a week. The risk of developing Alzheimer's disease also decreases. Walking more than a quarter mile a day reduced the incidence of Alzheimer's disease by half, according to the University of Virginia Health System study of men between the ages of 71 and 93.

Moderate-Intensity Walking

What is "moderate-intensity" walking as suggested by the AJPM study? It means walking at an "average pace," not speed-walking and not casual strolling, according to Alpa Patel, PhD, lead author of the study and researcher at the American Cancer Society. In 20 minutes, you could cover about a mile walking at an average pace and notice a small increase in your breathing.

There are many guidelines for exercise. For example, the American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of exercise, including brisk walking, 5 days a week. Many people today wear or carry step counters and try to achieve 10,000 steps every day for better health. However, what the AJPM study helps us realize is that any walking is better than no walking. In fact, it's the long periods of sitting that can have negative effects on health. So, taking 5 minute walking breaks during the day can protect your health.

Overcoming Barriers

I don't have 30 minutes a day to exercise, I'm not an active person, I don't like being outside when it's hot or cold, I'm too tired after work.

Sound familiar? These are common obstacles to starting — and continuing — a walking program.

The first step towards overcoming barriers is identifying what they are

and finding solutions that work for you. If you think you don't have 30 extra minutes to exercise, look for unexpected time slots in your day. Since you have to go to your child's soccer game, walk along the sidelines as you watch. Or park in a distant corner of the parking lot at work and take the steps instead of the elevator. This will give you a nice walk before and after work. Encourage 'walking meetings' if ever possible. You may find you can manage 10 minutes sessions of walking a few times a day.

People are more active than they realize. Even if you don't think you 'exercise,' consider activities like vacuuming and mowing the grass. These count as walking minutes. If you'd like to be more active, start slowly and choose activities you enjoy. Walking a dog with or without a friend can be very enjoyable. Exploring parks or museums can keep it interesting. If it's too hot or cold outside, remember the neighborhood mall or rec center treadmill. Pick a time of day when you aren't as tired as you might be after work, such as a short walk during a morning break or a longer one at lunchtime. Keep in mind that increasing your physical activity gives you more energy.

Get started today. Set small, manageable goals and increase them slowly. Try to make it fun by including family and friends over the holidays and by going to new places. Keep a notebook and record your progress, or let your smart phone or other device do the tracking for you.

Your KnovaSolutions nurse can help you establish goals and brain storm about ways to overcome your barriers. **Call KnovaSolutions at 800/355-0885**, Monday through Friday, 8 am - 5 pm, Mountain Time.

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