



Walking for Fitness

BY CATHERINE PIERRE

Getting in shape doesn't have to be complicated or difficult. In fact, when it comes to starting an exercise program, easy may be better.

"Walking is a great way to start exercising," says Julie Funderburk, an exercise physiologist at Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center in Baltimore, Md. "It's simple, low-impact, it doesn't require equipment, and it's natural."

All you need is a good pair of supportive shoes, some comfortable clothes, and a plan.

If you want to start a walking program, there are two ways to go about it, Funderburk says. The first option is to create a walking routine: Figure out what time of day is best for you and where you'll go—around your neighborhood if there are sidewalks, a local school track, a treadmill, or even the mall—and plan to take a walk every day, if possible. (The U.S. Surgeon General recommends 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity exercise most days of the week.)

"Start out slowly," Funderburk suggests. "If you've never done a walking program, start out with five- or 10-minute walks. If you've already been walking, try 30 minutes."

Simple Steps to Reach 10,000

Increasing the number of steps you take each day doesn't necessarily require a big time commitment, or even a trip to the track. "Be aware of what you're doing each day," says exercise physiologist Julie Funderburk. "Think, 'How can I make this more active?' "

AT HOME:

- Put that leaf blower back in the garage; raking leaves is a great form of exercise.
- Instead of spending money on a housecleaner, grab the mop and get to work.
- Don't carry all of the grocery bags into the house at once; more trips to the car mean lots more steps.
- If you're watching television, do something at every commercial: Change the laundry, carry those shoes up to the bedroom closet; tidy up the living room.

AT THE OFFICE:

- Instead of e-mailing a colleague, take a trip to his or her office for a face-to-face conversation instead.
- Skip the elevator, use the stairs.
- Decide to use a restroom on a different floor to get in a few extra flights each day.

OUT AND ABOUT:

- Walk to the store instead of driving, or if you have to drive, park farther away.
- Don't just sit there! If you're at the airport, walk around the terminal while you're waiting for your flight.
- At your kid's soccer game, do some laps around the field—you can still keep an eye on the game.

She adds that even if you're very busy, you should get a minimum of three walks a week. If you don't have a 30-minute break, try five minutes three times a day. It all adds up.

The other option is to get a pedometer and aim to walk 10,000 steps a day, or about five miles. "That sounds like a lot," Funderburk says, "but when you add up all the little activities, it's not as difficult to reach as people would think."

Pedometers are a very good motivational tool, says Funderburk. "You start to get used to watching how many steps you take. You may get to a point in the day when you look at it and say, 'Uh-oh. I've only walked this many steps.'"

If you want to go this route, wear the pedometer for one week without making any changes to your daily routine. That will give you your baseline number. Then, each week, aim to increase your steps by 10 percent.

"Some studies show that a typical inactive adult is going to take 3,000 steps a day," Funderburk says. "So the next week, we'd shoot for 3,300. The week after that, 3,600. If you set your goals too high, you could be setting yourself up for failure. Think of your short-term goals as adding 10 percent each week, and your long-term goal as getting to that 10,000."

Whichever option you choose, drink lots of water to stay hydrated, and make sure you're eating a healthy diet. The combination of good food and good exercise will make getting in shape a walk in the park.

Keep it Up!

Sometimes the walking is easy, it's staying motivated that's hard.

Exercise physiologist Julie Funderburk offers these tips:

- **Set goals that you can attain. And don't be afraid to readjust them if you need to—it's better than giving up!**
- **Find ways to make your walk fun. Bring a friend with you, listen to music or, if you're walking on a treadmill, tune in to your favorite TV show.**
- **Keep records of how far you've walked and how you feel; that way you can track your progress.**
- **Vary your routine as much as possible. Taking the same walk every day is a recipe for boredom. See if your neighborhood has a walking trail or a greenway.**

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