EAP MESSENGER

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INVEST EAP

Supporting a Healthy Organization

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WALK FOR GOOD HEALTH

Regular exercise is one of the most important things you can do to protect your health. But if you're like most people, you're busy — and it's hard to imagine squeezing in more time to exercise. The good news is that you can be fit and healthy without a rigorous workout schedule.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that adults participate in moderate-intensity aerobic exercise for 150 minutes throughout the week, and you can break the activity into smaller chunks, such as 10-15 minutes at a time. Moderate-intensity aerobic activity means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate, break a sweat, and breathe hard, but you're still able to talk. Examples of activities requiring moderate effort include pushing a lawn mower, playing doubles tennis, riding a bicycle on level ground, participating in a dance-aerobics class, or walking swiftly. You'll meet the guidelines for aerobic activity and maintain overall health and fitness by walking for 30 minutes, five days a week.

Walking is gentle, low-impact exercise that's easy, free, and suitable for people of all ages and most abilities. If you can stand, you can walk — and every step you take is a part of your journey to better health.

Cardiovascular Fitness

A fitness walking routine improves your heart health and cuts risk of heart disease by up to 40%. Walking helps your "ticker" because it:

Builds strength. Your heart is a muscle, and, like all muscles, it grows more robust with regular exercise. A stronger heart pumps more efficiently, increasing blood flow and bringing more oxygen back to the heart.

Lowers blood pressure. When the heart pumps more blood with less effort, tension in the veins drops off and resting blood pressure decreases. This protects blood vessels and keeps them pliable so they can adequately circulate blood.

Clears passageways. Moderate exercise reduces blood levels of LDL, the "bad" cholesterol, preventing formation of fatty deposits that inhibit blood flow through your arteries. When too much LDL circulates in the blood it clogs vessels that supply blood to the heart and brain, leading to heart attack and stroke. On the other hand, exercise boosts HDL, the "good" cholesterol that cleanses arteries.

Diabetes Prevention

Regular exercise also defends against diabetes mellitus, or type 2, a chronic disease that can lead to eye, nerve, and kidney damage. With daily walks, your body can:

Achieve optimal weight. Most people who have type 2 diabetes are overweight at diagnosis, because excessive body fat makes it harder to use insulin. Daily walks let you burn excess calories and fat to control your weight.

Manage blood sugar. Exercise increases insulin sensitivity and allows your body to properly regulate blood glucose levels.

Prevent precursors. High blood pressure and high cholesterol are risk factors for diabetes. Losing weight and regulating blood sugar helps you maintain healthy levels.

Cancer Defense

The connection between regular exercise and cancer prevention is documented in hundreds of scientific studies. The research suggests that physical activity affects certain biological mechanisms associated with this devastating disease, including:

Hormones. Regular exercise helps control hormones, leading to a lowered risk of hormone-related cancers of the breast, uterus, and prostate.

Body fat. Daily walks reduce overweight, which is associated with colon and breast cancers.

Immune function. Exercise enhances the body's production of natural killer cells, which reject tumors. Physical activity also improves resistance to free radicals that damage cells.

Immunity Boost

Daily walks provide a protective shield against common colds, viruses, and infection by:

Amplifying defenses. With

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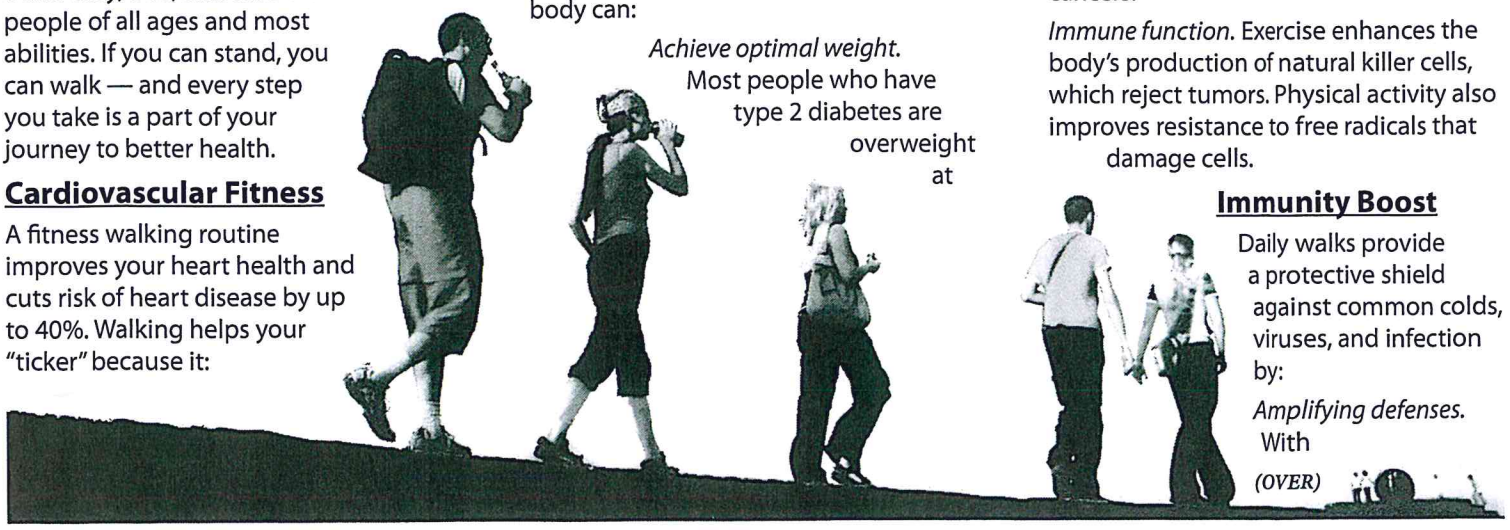

exercise, your body's natural killer cells fight viruses and infections.

Pumping more blood. While you're walking, greater quantities of blood circulate through your body and move disease-fighting white blood cells from the organs into the bloodstream.

Reducing stress. Keeping fit relieves stress and regulates stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, which repress the immune system.

Easing recovery. If you do catch a cold, your body can recover faster if you have maintained your fitness with daily walking. When you get sniffles or a minor cough, continue to exercise as long as you don't have fever, chills, or nausea.

Core Stability

Your core muscles are those in your trunk, hips, and pelvis, which help support your spine and control balance and stability. Walking 30 minutes a day five days a week is a great way to improve core strength because it:

Targets muscles. As you walk, the movement initiates from your center, with muscles in your abdomen, buttocks, hips, and back doing the majority of work. Regular walking makes these muscles stronger.

Improves posture. Walking upright with your back straight, shoulders down, and head lifted trains your body to keep the center of gravity over the pelvis and your torso upright. This prevents slouching and takes pressure off of your spine.

Develops flexibility. The walking motion flexes and extends the joints of your trunk, helping to prevent stiffness along the vertebrae, hips, and shoulders.

Bone Strength

People who are physically active maintain healthy bones and significantly reduce their risk of fractures compared to those who are sedentary. Walking regularly protects your skeleton by:

Slowing bone loss. The body naturally reabsorbs small amounts of calcium from bones, but regular physical activity slows the rate of bone loss and keeps bones solid.

Increasing bone density. Walking is weight-bearing exercise, which works your muscles and bones against gravity. Bones adapt to the impact of weight by building more bone cells to become more dense and strong.

Preventing falls. Frequent walking improves agility, coordination and balance, reducing the risk of falls and fractures.

Cognitive Function

Walking not only makes your body healthy, but also improves your ability to think, learn, and remember. Staying physically active boosts brain health and mental fitness by:

Increasing blood supply. Exercise augments the flow of blood to the brain, bringing in more oxygen and nutrients. This nourishes the brain and supports the creation of new nerve cells.

Supporting development. Aerobic activity boosts creativity, concentration, problem-solving, and adaptability. Studies show that children who walk to school do better on cognitive tests than those who ride the bus. Adults also think more clearly after exercising outdoors — functional brain scans show that physical activity outside stimulates neural connections in the brain, creating a denser network that can better store and process information.

Enhancing mood. Medical evidence shows that exercise increases concentrations of chemicals in the brain that affect emotions. It increases serotonin, which fosters transmission of brain signals and acts as an antidepressant. Physical activity also boosts dopamine, which controls the ability to experience pleasure, and endorphins, which cause euphoria.

Improving sleep. Exercise makes it easier to fall asleep and slumber longer. It also alleviates sleep disorders such as insomnia, jet lag, and restless leg syndrome. A good night's sleep allows you to stay focused, alert, and easygoing throughout the day.

Defeating brain-robbing illness. Daily walks reduce your risk for conditions that contribute to impaired memory, including stroke, depression, and Alzheimer's disease. Studies of older adults showed that aerobic exercise developed new brain cells and increased the size of the anterior hippocampus, improving memory function in aging humans.

At any age, walking is a great way to stay physically fit, intellectually strong, and feeling great.

6 Second Summary:

Walking regularly maintains good health by:

- Keeping your cardiovascular system robust.
- Reducing risk for chronic diseases including diabetes and cancer.
- Boosting immunity and fighting infection.
- Stabilizing core muscles.
- Strengthening bones.
- Improving brain function.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

American Volkssport Association: *http://www.ava.org*

Centers for Disease Control, Easy Ways to Start Exercising: *http://www.helpguide.org/articles/exercise-fitness/easy-ways-to-start-exercising.htm*

Let's Move: *http://www.letsmove.gov/get-active*

Harvard Men's Health Watch, "Walking: Your Steps to Health"

http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Mens_Health_Watch/2009/August/Walking-Your-steps-to-health

EAP SERVICES

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