

Workout!

Walking might be a low-impact workout, but it has a mighty high impact on your health. Studies show that a regular walking routine can reduce your risk of a heart attack and type 2 diabetes, lower your blood pressure, boost your mood and help you ditch fat. And now that the weather is warming up, it's the perfect time to take your routine outdoors, which will give you an even better workout.

"When you're walking outside, the natural terrain varies, which means that your intensity is always changing," says New York City personal trainer Stacy Berman. "This can spike your metabolism, so you'll burn more calories." Here's how to get started.

• Warm Up and Stretch First!

Spend five to 10 minutes warming up by marching in place or jumping rope. Then stretch the muscles you'll be using most while walking: your calves, hamstrings and quads, says Berman. (One easy way to hit multiple muscles at once? Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, heels flat, and slowly bend your knees until you're slightly squatting. Hold for 30 seconds, then return to standing position.) Stretching also helps you avoid foot and ankle injuries. "To prevent these common pitfalls, perform simple exercises, like pointing and flexing the toes, to warm up your ankles before and after your walk," Berman advises.

• Don't Just Stroll

On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is easy and 10 is very difficult), a beginner's walk should be between 5 and 7, notes Berman. Shoot for about 30 minutes of walking, but if that feels physically impossible, don't worry: "If you can do only 10 minutes at first, then aim to do 11 minutes the next time you walk," she says. "Or try to cover the same distance in a shorter amount of time." Just remember that you want to keep it challenging, so always increase either your speed or your distance. And once you feel comfortable walking on flat terrain, look for an area with more difficult hills.

• Stay Motivated With This Trick

Studies find that new walkers who wear a pedometer and set daily goals shed more pounds. Why? The feedback triggers a desire to find new ways to sneak additional exercise into each day. You'll be surprised by how easy it is. Start by walking 1,000 steps per day, and work your way up to 10,000.

Pick the Perfect Shoes

Score kicks that will help you avoid injuries with these tips from Denise Knickman, a physical therapist at The Institute for Foot and Ankle Reconstruction at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore, Md.

CUSHIONED HEELS They should allow for minimal movement, so your feet are snug within the shoes (too much movement can cause blisters) and should be about ½ inch high to prevent the Achilles tendons from overstretching.

ROUNDED SOLES

All shoes designed for walking include this feature, which supports heel-to-toe movement. (The soles of running shoes, on the other hand, are narrower in front, encouraging you to push off with your toes.)

PADDED INSOLES If you have high arches, look for a lot of interior cushioning. If you have almost no noticeable arch, opt for stiffer shoes with more support.

PADDED TONGUE

Reduces pressure from the laces

REFLECTIVE MATERIAL

On heels and toes to make you more visible

TREAD Opt for a thicker, wear-resistant tread if you're going to be on rough terrain or walking in bad weather.



LENGTH The shoes should be about a thumbnail width beyond your longest toes (a little wiggle room is good!).

April 18, 2006

A NEW WEEKLY **Walk!**

Good Housekeeping

quick & simple

YOUR WEIGHT

100 lbs.

140 lbs.

180 lbs. or more

...OUS PACE (4.5 TO 5 MPH)

...blended mocha coffee drink

...z. chocolate frozen yogurt

...a 3 Musketeers bar

APRIL 18, 2006 7