

Walking Can Be Good For Your Physical and Mental Health

Spring time makes you want to spend time outdoors and inspires you to want to be more active. One of the ways you can be more active is through walking. Walking is a gentle, low-impact exercise that most anyone can do. You can begin slow and then ease into a higher level of fitness and health. Walking is accessible to everyone. It is not expensive. It is safe and doesn't require any practice.

Like any exercise, walking can help you to achieve several important health benefits. It can help you lower your LDL cholesterol (the bad), raise your HDL cholesterol (the good), lower your blood pressure, reduce your risks of or help you manage type 2 diabetes, manage your weight, improve your attitude and mood and help you to stay strong and fit.

Research shows that regular, brisk walking can reduce the risk of a heart attack by the same amount as more vigorous exercise such as jogging.

Walking does not take a lot of skill. Still, you want to take the time to prepare yourself in order to prevent injuries, such as muscle pain and blisters.

Begin with good, comfortable shoes. Choose shoes that have proper arch support, a firm heel and thick flexible soles to cushion your feet and absorb shock. When shopping for a new pair of shoes, be sure to walk in them in the store.

Dress in loose fitting, comfortable clothing and in layers if you need to get used to the temperature change. If you walk outside, choose clothes that are appropriate for the weather. Avoid rubberized materials that don't allow for your body to perspire and breath. Wear bright colors or reflective tape if you are walking after dark so that motorists can see you.

Using correct posture and movements is important in order to get the most benefit from walking. Warm up about five minutes. This can include walking slowly to warm up your muscles. Increase your pace until you feel warm.

Stretch after warming up your muscles before walking. This can include calf stretches, quadriceps stretch, hamstring stretch, and side stretch.

Cool down after each walk to reduce stress on your heart and muscles. End each walking session by walking slowly for five minutes and then repeat your stretches.

Begin walking slowly and easily. Try short walks at first 10 to 15 minutes. Then gradually work your way up to 30 to 60 minutes.

Measure the intensity of your workout. As you walk check your heart rate. Knowing your heart rate allows you to increase the intensity to maximize your workout or to slow down so that you won't overdo it.

Stay motivated and stick with your commitment to walk. Think about the potential health benefits. Make it fun. If you don't like to walk alone, invite someone to walk with you. Vary your routine, walk on tracks, walk in neighborhoods, go to the gym to walk, even the store or a shopping mall.

Join Parker County Extension by participating in Walk Across Texas, April 3 through May 28. You can walk with up to a team of 8 or walk by yourself. Information about teams and forms are available from the Parker County Extension office located at 604 North Main Street in Weatherford or you can visit the website at www.walkacrosstexas.tamu.edu. There will be Kick off walks the beginning week. Check our website at www.parker.agrilife.org for more information.