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Walking has been shown to boost your energy and increase your stamina. The more you do it, the more invigorated you may feel. However, the challenge is making walking (or consistent movement in general) a regular part of your daily routine. "Many health coaches, doctors, and fitness trainers will tell you that the best form of exercise is one you'll actually maintain," Lent says. There are reasons walking is hailed as one of the best forms of exercise for heart health: The National Heart Foundation of Atrraia estimates that walking 30 minutes or more each day can actually lower the risk of heart disease, reducing the risk of stroke by a whopping 35 percent. Plus, daily walking can help you maintain a healthy weight, metabolism, blood pressure, and blood cholesterol, all of which help keep you in good cardiovascular shape. Even if you can't commit to 30 minutes per day, evidence shows that even a small amount of walking is better than none when it comes to our hearts (yes, vigorous vacuuming, playing with the kids, walking the dog, and going on that long grocery run all count!). According to a 2023 review published in The British Journal of Sports Medicine, walking might save your life. Researchers analyzed the results of 196 studies and determined that a brisk walk (even just 11 minutes a day) significantly lowered subjects' risk for heart disease, various kinds of cancer, and overall mortality. What better argument for lacing up your shoes and hitting the pavement? It's no secret that exercise is a well-researched and proven way to reduce stress. Walking releases endorphins, a feel-good chemical in the body that promotes a state of pleasure like laughter and love. "Endorphins interact with receptors in the brain and bring about feelings of well-being, increased self-esteem, increased pain tolerance, and even a sense of euphoria, often referred to as a 'runner's high,'" Lam explains. A 2018 study also found that even single, brief 10-minute bouts of walking improved the mood state of participants. "Being active impacts the way our brain processes neurotransmitters like dopamine," explains clinical psychologist Allison Grupski. "It has an immediate impact." Research shows that physical activity, including walking, can reduce depression. A study of 121 post-menopausal women, for example, found that those who walked three times per week for 40 minutes at a time had a significant decrease in depression. A second study discovered that even walking at a brisk pace for just 2.5 hours per week was associated with a significantly lower risk of depression compared with adults who don't exercise. "Depression affects millions of people globally and is a leading cause of disability worldwide," says Brian Shinkle, DO, the medical director at Pivot Onsite Innovations and Pivot Occupational Health. "Data has long shown the benefits of exercise on reducing depression." A meta-analysis of data from more than 300,000 participants made an important discovery: Those who walked regularly had a 30 percent lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes. This is because walking can help control or lower blood sugar. Walking at a brisk pace, in particular (faster than 20 minutes per mile), was linked with a 41 percent lower risk of type 2 diabetes. A study of 201 people with type 2 diabetes, on the other hand, found that every additional 2,600 steps of daily walking was associated with a 0.2 percent lower A1c, or blood sugar level. Another health benefit of walking every day: Researchers believe that exercise can significantly boost immune function, potentially causing a change in antibodies and white blood cells that help your body fight off illness. The temporary rise in body temperature may also prevent bacteria from growing while slowing down the release of stress hormones (which can increase your chance of illness). Plus, walking may flush bacteria from the lungs and airways, reducing your chances of picking up cold and flu viruses. An estimated 75 to 85 percent of Americans will experience lower back pain at some point in their lifetime. Fortunately, there's an inexpensive cure that requires no special equipment: walking. In a study published in the journal Clinical Rehabilitation, researchers recruited participants with lower back pain, instructing half to follow a muscle-strengthening program in a rehab clinic and half to follow a program of regular aerobic walking (two to three times a week for 20 to 40 minutes). Both groups reported that their pain improved significantly. According to the researchers, walking strengthens the abdominal and back muscles in ways similar to the rehab exercises—and it was the additional advantage of being free and available at any time. As another bonus, the walking subjects boosted their overall physical fitness: When given a short walking test, they went an average of 0.05 miles farther than they had before the study. Shinkle says walking can play a huge role in reducing the development and progression of osteoarthritis, a form of arthritis that affects the joints. "Exercise has long shown benefits in treating and preventing osteoarthritis. A recent study shows that walking may improve pain and slow the progression of the disease," Shinkle says. Researchers found that people who walked for exercise had a 40 percent reduction in the development of new frequent knee pain when compared to a group that didn't walk. "Exercise [like walking] has numerous health benefits and should always be a first-line prevention and treatment approach to degenerative joint disease," Shinkle adds. In a series of four experiments conducted at Stanford University, researchers compared subjects' creativity levels while they walked versus while they sat. When the researchers administered a test that involved imagining new uses for ordinary objects (like a brick or a shoe), the walking subjects' creative output increased by an average of 60 percent, whether they took outdoor strolls or walked inside with a treadmill. As the study authors wrote, "Walking opens up the free flow of ideas, and it is a simple and robust solution to the goals of increasing creativity and increasing physical activity." Walking every day can significantly improve posture because it encourages an upright stance and strengthens the muscles that support your spine. This benefit includes your core, pelvic muscles, and back. Walking also promotes better balance and coordination, both of which you need to maintain good posture. The more you walk over time, the less muscle imbalances and joint tension you'll have, which can take a toll on your posture. It'll get easier and become more natural to stand upright, both during movement and at rest. Better posture not only improves physical appearance, but it's also important for preventing chronic pain and discomfort that's associated with poor alignment—especially as you age. Walking regularly can also enhance lung capacity because the more you do it, the more you gradually increase the efficiency and strength of your respiratory muscles. It works like this: As you walk, your body needs more oxygen. This causes your lungs to work harder and expand bigger to deliver that oxygen to your bloodstream. Over time, this increased respiratory effort strengthens your diaphragm and the other muscles that you need to breathe properly. This is important because improved lung capacity can help you breathe more easily during physical activity, so you feel less breathless and have better endurance. Walking also improves the quality of your sleep. One study—a four-week intervention that increased participants' daily steps—found that those who were more active throughout the entire month had better sleep (particularly amongst women). The research also found that, on active days, the participants reported better and longer sleeps than they had on less active days. Ultimately, walking helps to regulate your body's natural circadian rhythm, which is the internal clock that controls your sleep-wake cycles. It increases the production of sleep-promoting hormones (like melatonin), which makes it easier for you to fall asleep and stay asleep. And the reduced anxiety and stress from walking can also help you sleep sounder at night. If you want to work on your balance, add walking to your fitness repertoire. Researchers tried a walking routine against a balance and strength training workout, and found that the walking workout reduced the risk of falls significantly compared to the strength workout in an elderly population. If you're a fan of backward walking, that can provide additional benefits for your balance, and is considered an effective therapy for people recovering from strokes. Grupski and Lam agree that walking is one of the best places to start when it comes to making movement a daily priority. "You don't need fancy equipment, you don't need to learn complicated moves, and you don't need special attire," Lam says. "You can just put on some good sneakers, comfortable clothes, and maybe listen to a good playlist. It's often genteel enough that even if your health is compromised, you can still get many of the benefits from 30 minutes a day of walking at a brisk pace." Grupski says the first step to making walking a habit is to forget about keeping score. "We tend to get caught up in numbers," Grupski says. "Those numbers can feel really daunting and actually get in the way of taking the first step." Instead, Grupski encourages people to do what they can in the moment, whether that's three minutes of walking a few times a day or 30 minutes all at once. These are some simple tricks Grupski recommends to sneak in extra steps. It's a process called piggybacking, or habit stacking—tying new behaviors to familiar ones we already do. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.Park further away when running errands.Walk around the house while your coffee brews.Take a "walking meeting" instead of sitting at your desk.Walk around the field during the kids' sports practice.Make get-togethers with friends a walk around a park or a hike, instead of a more sedentary pursuit. Whether you walk in segments or all at once, making walking a regular habit will help it become second nature. "The more we do something regularly, the more likely we are to keep it up," Grupski says. "Repetition is key when it comes to habit development." Frequently Asked Questions As with most exercises, you should pay less attention to the numbers and more attention to how you feel. How much you need to walk to see the health benefits will depend on various factors like your starting fitness level, your weight, your pace, and more. If you don't notice any health benefits from walking, try taking longer walks or picking up the pace to exert more energy. Research suggests that walking at a brisk pace for at least 150 minutes per week is good for you. Yes, walking backward on a treadmill does provide health benefits. Walking backward can also help you work different muscle groups in your legs than forward walking, which can help to improve overall balance, coordination, and strength. However, ensure your safety first. Walking gets your heart pumping, just like running and cycling. However, how much health benefit you get out of walking depends on a few factors. Walking uphill, for example, will require more energy than walking on flat ground. Walking at a faster speed may also take more effort than cycling at a slow speed. And you can consider wearing a weighted vest or ankle weights to help increase the intensity of your walking workouts. Generally, running and cycling will be a higher intensity cardio workout because they require more physical exertion. A white back, 10,000 steps per day (or about five miles, total) was set as a daily fitness goal, but factors like your age, health, and fitness level could put that out of reach. If you want to set the 10,000 step goal, you can start by increasing your steps a little at a time—commit to an extra 500 per day, for instance—until you hit that sweet spot. health centershealth & living center Walking as a form of exercise has numerous health benefits. Remember your first step? What a fussy everyone made! And then you continued to walk right on through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood, but somewhere along the way, like most adults, you probably stopped walking so much. In fact, most adults spend most of their day sitting — as many as 6.5 hours. Part of the reason may be your hectic, stressful life, with not a moment to spare for recreation or formal exercise. The environment plays a part too: inactivity has been engineered into our lives, from escalators to remote controls to riding lawnmowers to robotic vacuum cleaners to electric toothbrushes to the disappearance of sidewalks and safe places to walk. But research shows all this automation is bad for our health. Inactivity is the second leading preventable cause of death in the United States, second only to tobacco use. You'd think a simple activity like walking would be just that, simple. However, fewer than 50% of American adults do enough exercise to gain any health or fitness benefits from physical activity. Is walking our salvation? Evidence suggests it's probably a good start. Walking prevents type 2 diabetes. The Diabetes Prevention Program showed walking 150 minutes per week and losing just 7% of your body weight (12-15 pounds) can reduce your risk of diabetes by 58%. Walking strengthens your heart. In one study, mortality rates among retired men who walked less than one mile per day were nearly twice that among those who walked more than two miles per day. Women in the Nurse's Health Study (72,488 female nurses) who walked three hours or more per week reduced their risk of a heart attack or other coronary event by 35% compared with women who did not walk. Walking is good for your brain. In a study on walking and cognitive function, researchers found that women who walked the equivalent of an easy pace at least 1.5 hours per week had significantly better cognitive function and less cognitive decline than women who walked less than 40 minutes per week. Walking is good for your bones. Research shows postmenopausal women who walk approximately one mile each day have higher whole-body bone density than women who walk shorter distances, and walking is also effective in slowing the rate of bone loss from the legs. Walking helps alleviate symptoms of depression. Walking for 30 minutes, three to five times per week for 12 weeks reduced symptoms of depression as measured with a standard depression questionnaire by 47%. Walking reduces the risk of breast and colon cancer. Women who performed the equivalent of one hour and 15 minutes to two and a half hours per week of brisk walking had an 18% decreased risk of breast cancer compared with inactive women. Many studies have shown that exercise can prevent colon cancer, and even if a person develops colon cancer, the benefits of exercise appear to continue both by increasing quality of life and reducing mortality. Walking improves fitness. Walking just three times a week for 30 minutes can significantly increase cardiorespiratory fitness. Walking in short bouts improves fitness, too! A study of sedentary women showed short bouts of brisk walking (three 10-minute walks per day) resulted in similar improvements in fitness and were at least as effective in decreasing body fat as long bouts (one 30-minute walk per day). Walking improves physical function. Research shows that walking improves fitness and physical function and prevents physical disability in older persons. Thousands of studies have proven exercise is good for you, but exercise scientists are also looking at the other side: the negative aspects of being a couch potato. Study after study shows sitting is not good for health or fitness. Researchers showed that people who reported sitting "almost all of the time" died sooner from cardiovascular disease than people who studied sitting "almost none of the time," ¼, ½, or ¾ of the time, and they did so in what was called a "dose-response" manner. This means the more you sit the more likely you are to die prematurely. One study even showed that for "every single hour of television watched after the age of 25 the viewer's life expectancy was reduced by 21.8 minutes!" Finally, if you've got a desk job, walking just five minutes per hour during every workday would help you burn approximately 33,000 additional calories per year. Provided you didn't change your diet, the change in your walking habit could equate to a loss of body weight of 9.4 pounds at the end of the year! Considering most people gain weight as they get older, you could get a big bang for your buck with not so much effort. There are two types of formal walking: power-walking (also known as speed-walking) and racewalking. Both types require technique; the difference between them is that racewalking is an Olympic sport with rules, for example, that the athlete's back toe cannot leave the ground until the heel of the front foot has touched. Power-walking is done more recreationally. 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