

Walking to Fitness

As a promoter of good physical health, very few things beat that wonderful skill you worked so hard to master way back when you were about a year and a half into life. We're talking, of course, about walking. Back then, your motivation was pretty much finding a better way to get to whatever mischief beckoned to you at point B. As an adult, you can use your walking skills with another kind of point B in mind: good health. Let's consider some of the many healthful benefits of walking.

First of all, it's an aerobic exercise, meaning it strengthens your heart, improves your breathing, and burns calories. And there's more.

A regular walking program puts your body and mind in better balance with each other so you work better, play better, sleep better, and just plain feel better. There are other practical benefits as well, like flexibility. You can get out and enjoy nature on days when the weather cooperates. When it doesn't, you can hit the mall or the stairs at your workplace during break time. Fitness centers with indoor tracks and treadmills are readily available if it's in your budget. Other than that, once you have the right shoes, walking is pretty much free.

With all it has going for it, we're left with very little reason not to have a walking routine.

So give it the priority it deserves. Set aside at least 30 minutes a day to walk. Why 30 minutes? Studies conducted by Shape Up America found that 10,000 steps per day is the right amount to help people reach their weight and fitness goals. For context, most people average about 900 – 3,000 steps in the course of their daily activities. An additional 30 minutes or more of brisk walking will bring that number up to the 10,000 step goal.

If you actually want to count steps, you can get a good pedometer for around 10 dollars. They can be found at discount stores in the sports section.

If you can't do all 10,000 steps at once, that's okay. Break it up into 10-minute sections throughout the day. When you walk, pace yourself. Marathon runners know to start slowly, careful not to run out of energy before they get to the finish. Of course they're in a race. You're not. So if you do feel tired, by all means stop and rest. You should also stop if something starts to hurt, a sure sign that you're pushing yourself too hard. It's probably a good idea to have whatever hurts looked at by your family physician before you resume your routine. And while

we're on the subject, remember it's always a good idea to check with your family physician before you commit to any exercise program.

Now, in the event that you're not among the ranks of the lucky few who actually enjoy exercise, you're going to need to stay motivated. One very good way to do that is find yourself a walking partner. Make an I'll-stay-strong-if you-will pact and stick to it. Challenge one another to find creative destinations and other ways to make it fun.

Another good motivator is keeping a written log on your progress. Document minutes, step counts, and whatever inspired thoughts come to you. It's also a good tool for setting and keeping goals. You'll be surprised how rapid your progress will be.

And remember, the ultimate goal is good health. And walking is a wonderful way not only to achieve good health, but to celebrate it as well. For you, that's an ultimate win-win situation.

©2010 Forest Health Services, LLC

Barix and the Barix Clinics logo are registered trademarks of Forest Health Services, LLC. All other trademarks or registered trademarks are the property of their respective owners. All rights reserved. Unauthorized duplication or modification is prohibited.

Barix Clinics: 800-282-0066