

Welcoming Wellness

At Home Tennessee has made a resolution to get healthy, and we want you to join us. This month, discover the benefits of an activity as simple as walking and lighten up your meals. Check upcoming issues for more healthy habits.



Photo courtesy of dreamstime.com

Walk the Walk

The key to beginning a healthy lifestyle regime is not to overdo it. This month, start with walking—this simple exercise helps to lower blood pressure and cholesterol, increase bone density, improve balance and increase self confidence and body image, says Becky Fox, a certified trainer and owner of Knoxville's Fox Fitness. While walking is an exercise that can be done every day, (outside or on a treadmill depending on your preferences), Becky suggests that beginners commit to at least three days per week. Once walking becomes a routine, increase this to no less than five days per week.

One size fits all Because walking is low-impact it is great for beginners, sedentary individuals or people with back and knee problems. Walking is also a good choice for seniors, since it helps increase bone density and builds strong legs and strength.

Listen to your body The duration and intensity of walks depends on you, Becky says. She recommends starting with 15 minute walks and increasing by five minutes as the activity gets easier. The goal should be to walk for 30 minutes to an hour most days of the week. If you find you are sweating less, able to breathe better or that your heart rate is lower, it's a sign to up the duration and speed. The faster you walk, the more calories you will burn. Most people will burn about 200-400 calories per hour, or about 100 calories per mile, Becky says.

Shoe sense "The most important piece of gear for the walker would be the walking shoes," Becky says. Don't wear your normal, every day footwear—good walking shoes will support your body, help reduce pain and blisters and provide flexibility. Everyone's feet are different, so find a pair that feels right to you. A pedometer is also a great gadget. Before beginning your walking program, track the number of steps you take in a normal day. From there attempt to increase by a minimum of 500 steps a day on a weekly basis until you regularly reach the recommended 10,000 daily steps.

Buddy system Invite a friend to join or look for a walking group in your area. Training for a walking event will give you a concrete goal to work toward, so check area calendars or websites like racesonline.com for dates. If your routine starts to get dull, try a local hiking trail, nature walk or greenway for a change of scenery, Becky suggests.

Challenge yourself To benefit from walking, your routine must be challenging—"You should be tired and feel like you worked when you are done with your walk," Becky says. To determine if you're working out hard enough, evaluate your workout. **Try the talk test.** Talking should be a bit difficult while exercising but still possible. If talking is a breeze, pick up the pace. If you're wheezing and couldn't talk if you tried, slow down the pace. **Determine your target heart rate range.** Whether you count it yourself or use a monitor, your pulse can be a great measure of intensity. You want to keep your target heart rate range between 65-85 percent of your maximum heart rate. To calculate your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220. Multiply that by .65 and by .85 to get your target heart rate range. This number gives you the beats per minute you should expect to reach fat burning intensity. Keep in mind this is an estimate and some medications can affect your heart rate.