

START WALKING

By Martha Funnell, MS, RN, CDE

What could be better than taking a walk on a nice, sunny day? It gives you the chance to enjoy nature and speak to friends and it can brighten your whole outlook on life.

Many people choose to walk for exercise. Most experts suggest 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. There are many great reasons to walk. You don't need to buy anything, you can do it anywhere and you do not have to join a gym or pay for a class. Walking burns calories, helps you keep your blood pressure levels where you want them and helps you cope with stress. In a large study among people who were at high risk, walking helped them prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes. Exercise also has been shown to help reduce the risk for heart attacks and strokes, Alzheimer's disease and depression.

With all of the benefits, you would think that everyone would walk. But, there are a lot of reasons that people struggle to become more active.

Here are a few common reasons why people don't walk and some ideas to overcome them.

"I JUST CAN'T FIND THE TIME TO WALK."

This is the most common reason people have for not being active. There are just too many other things to do and demands on your time, including all the things you must do to earn a living and care for your family.

Here are some ways to fit walking into your day. If you can't find 30 minutes to walk, try to set aside three 10-minute blocks of time for walking. The results are the same and it may be easier. For example, some people park 10 minutes from where they work then take a 10-minute walk at lunchtime. By the end of their workday, they have walked a total of 30 minutes.

For most people, exercise doesn't just happen. They

make the time. Many people find they do better if they walk at a set time each day. Others check their schedules at the start of each week and write down when they plan to walk. Writing it down is a way to promise yourself that you will really do it.

Sometimes it is a matter of finding out what is truly important to you. One way to honor your family and all the other tasks you do is to take good care of yourself. Taking time to walk is not selfish. You can help others better if you are in good health.

"I DON'T HAVE A SAFE PLACE TO WALK."

It is true that there are not always safe places to walk. Or, it may be that on snowy winter days or very hot summer days it is not safe for you to be outside. One option is to create a "walking trail" inside your house. Map out a route you can do for

30 minutes. If you have stairs, include them as well. Other options are to go to a community center, school or mall to walk.

"WALKING IS BORING."

A lot of people find the best thing about walking is how good they feel when they finish. Think of things you can do to make walking more fun. Would it help to walk with a friend? Is there music you can play or a TV program you can watch while on your treadmill that can make the time pass more quickly? Could you walk another way around your neighborhood for a change? Some people like to wear a pedometer and set a step goal to make their walking more fun. It also may help to do other kinds of exercise sometimes. For example, if it rains, try dancing in your house as a change of pace.

"I JUST HATE TO EXERCISE."

The good news is that you don't have to love exercise to get the benefits, you just have to do it. Although you may not be able to find an exercise you enjoy, try to find something you don't really mind doing. If walking isn't right for you, try other things. Keep in mind that any type of movement is helpful.

