

Regular Exercise - It's Easier Than You Think

Would you like to do more exercise, but feel you don't have the time to fit it in? Or do you think you're so unfit that exercise will be too difficult or make your muscles sore?

If you do, read on and you'll be pleasantly surprised. Many people don't do regular exercise because they think they're too busy or they're not fit enough. One reason for this is the idea that for exercise to do you any good you must do it for at least half an hour each day and it has to be strenuous.

The good news is that fitness experts now say you don't need to do your daily 30 minutes of exercise all at once. You can break it up into smaller periods throughout the day - a five minute brisk walk to the bus stop in the morning, for instance, a 20 minute walk after lunch and a 15 minute walk in the evening after work. As long as you accumulate 30 minutes of moderately brisk exercise during the day - preferably every day - you'll be healthier for it. Depending on your lifestyle, there are a lot of different ways to fit periods of walking into your day - walking the dog, walking to the shops, taking the children for walks, or walking with them to school, walking with friends, walking along the beach or in the park, or even joining a walking club.

People who walk regularly, remember, lower their risk of heart attack and stroke and are less likely to develop diabetes in middle age. People who are more active also have a lower risk of colon cancer. Regular walking makes it easier to control weight, helps you sleep better and even makes you stronger - this helps prevent osteoporosis, the bone thinning disease which affects many women after menopause.

Walking is also a great way to relax. People who've worked hard all day often say that the last thing they need at the end of the day is a walk - it will only make them feel more tired. But the opposite is true - a walk usually makes you feel more, not less, energetic.

To get the health benefits of walking, it's important to do it briskly. But that doesn't mean walking so fast that you feel uncomfortable. Find the pace that suits you best. You should still be able to talk comfortably as you walk. Some tips to remember:

- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing and well-cushioned flat-soled shoes. If you walk in the dark, wear light colored clothing so motorists can easily see you.
- Wear a hat and sunscreen and use sunscreen SP15+ on exposed skin. It's best to avoid walking in the hottest part of the day.
- If your breathing becomes uncomfortable, slow down or stop.
- Avoid walking immediately after meals and don't walk if you have a fever or bad cold.

- It helps to "warm up" your muscles before you start walking briskly - you can do this by walking around slowly and moving your arms for about five minutes.

Think BIG but start small. Begin with something simple like a walk at lunchtime. Remember, you don't have to push yourself to the limit.

It's never too late to start, and if you can't make the full 30 minutes most days, remember - some activity is better than no activity as far as health is concerned.

Before getting started, see your doctor if you haven't been active for some time, have a history of heart disease or chest pain, have diabetes, are very overweight, are a smoker or have high blood pressure.

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