

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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Walk your way to health and fitness with 10,000 steps



Walking is a great way to get into shape. Health and fitness researchers have found that low intensity exercise, like walking, can be just as beneficial as traditional high intensity exercise for losing weight and improving overall health. Walking can decrease the risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis, and can improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Dr. Frank Hu of the Harvard School of Public Health said, "For the vast majority of the population, the benefits of walking are enormous, with little or no harm." He continues, "Because walking is accessible, is relatively safe, and can easily be incorporated into a daily routine, it is a form of exercise that is practical and suitable for most individuals, especially women, diabetic patients and the elderly."

Many fitness experts recommend setting a fitness goal of walking 10,000 steps, or about five miles, per day. A sedentary person may walk about 2,000 to 3,000 steps per day. So achieving the goal of 10,000 steps may be difficult to attain without intentionally going out and walking.

Pedometers

The best way to count your steps is with a pedometer, a small device which you wear on your belt or waistband. A basic pedometer records how many steps you take and can be purchased for about \$20 at a sporting goods store. Some pedometers include functions such as time, distance, and calories expended.

Getting Started

For one week, wear your pedometer from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep. Go about your regular activities and do not try to increase your steps at this time.

Each day, log the number of steps that you take. At the end of the week, calculate the average number of steps you take each day.

The second week, try to walk 500 steps more than your daily average each day. For example, if you averaged 2,500 steps per day during the first week, try to walk 3,000 steps each day the second week.

In the following weeks, try to increase your daily steps by 500 steps per week. By increasing your steps at this rate, you will achieve the goal of 10,000 steps in about 15 weeks.

If you are in poor physical condition or if you feel that you are increasing your steps too rapidly, slow down a bit or try smaller increases.

If you have any health concerns, please talk to your doctor before starting an exercise program.

Easy ways to increase the number of steps you take

Here are some ideas for increasing your steps each day:

- Park your car farther from the store. Better yet, walk to the store.
- Go dancing. It's fun and healthy.
- Walk your dog.
- Go for a walk with your family or friends.
- Mow your lawn with a push-type mower.
- At work, take a walking break, instead of a coffee break.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Hide the TV remote control and get up to change channels.

Stress: Do you need more or less?



How stress can work for—not against—you

You've heard it all: stress is bad for you, stress can be good for you, too much is distressing, a little a blessing. What does it all mean? The right amount of stress is good for you, but what's the right amount?

What is stress?

Stress is simply your body's reaction to a new situation. Your heart beats faster, your body produces a natural stimulant called adrenaline, you breathe more rapidly, you are more alert, and you may perspire more.

If followed by periods of relaxation, stress is very natural and productive. It can give you the "competitive edge" in sports, keep you alert and concentrated for a test, or can literally save your life in an emergency.

However, when you are constantly wound up and cannot relax, these same responses can lead to increased blood pressure, anxiety attacks and a wide range of physical disorders.

How much is too much?

Generally the symptoms will become apparent if you are overly stressed. Insomnia, appetite changes, excessive fatigue, depression, headaches, stomach ailments or muscle tension are all indications of an overly stressed lifestyle—all stress and no relaxation. What can you do to lessen these obvious health risks?

Eliminate excess stress

The key to bringing the stress in your life to a manageable level is to try to avoid or eliminate unnecessary stressful situations. When you can't avoid them, be sure to balance stressful experiences with periods of relaxation. For instance, waiting in a long line or at the doctor's office could be stressful because you might imagine all the other things

could be doing. Often, you can make stressful situations less stressful with some creative problem solving.

What if you turned "wasted time" into extra leisure time by reading a book, doing a crossword, or listening to books on cassette? Take a pad and pencil and try your hand at sketching. You know what you like to do. Find time in the day to do things that relax you.

Plan time for relaxation. Five minutes of stretching, deep breathing, a warm bath, or uninterrupted silence may be all you need to break the pattern of tension and fatigue.

When you set time aside to relax, you'll feel refreshed, revived and better able to handle the situation and challenges you face each day.

Coming soon to a location near you...

Your CHP Benefits Administrator will be coming to your location sometime soon to present the next health education training session. Check with your contact for details and be sure to attend. These training sessions are for your benefit!