

## Healthy Living : Fitness

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## Walk a Little, Live a Lot (Longer)

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What if there was something simple you could do every day that would burn calories, be good for your heart, and help you stay young. You'd do it, right? Well, that's why researchers and doctors are so gung ho about walking, especially in light of new research that credits it for everything from [cutting breast cancer risks](#) to helping you sleep. Walking is not just a weenie activity for the nonathletic, says Michelle Look, MD, national medical consultant to the Breast Cancer 3-Day Walk and a physician who specializes in sports medicine in San Diego: "It's good for just about anybody, and the health

benefits are particularly significant for women." Here, eight reasons to start walking—or just walk a little more often.

### 1. It's great for the heart

In a recent study conducted at Duke University Medical Center, researchers found that walking briskly for 30 minutes every day lowers your odds of developing [metabolic syndrome](#), a cluster of risk factors linked to higher risks of [heart disease](#), [diabetes](#), and [stroke](#). Roughly 24 million women in the United States have metabolic syndrome. Don't have time for a daily half-hour walk? Try multitasking: A British study found that active commuting (incorporating walking and cycling into your sedentary commute) is associated with an 11 percent reduction in heart-disease risk, especially among women. (For sneaky ways to work more walking into your life, see [No Time to Walk? Try This.](#))

### 2. It cuts breast-cancer risks

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Walking, even for a few hours a week, significantly reduces [breast-cancer risk](#), according to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The thinking is that walking helps reduce levels of body fat, a source of estrogen. The research looked at 74,000 postmenopausal women between the ages of 50 and 79. Those at a normal weight lowered their risk by 30 percent; those who were overweight, by 10 to 20 percent. Younger women may also gain similar benefits.

### 3. It helps you sleep

A brisk walk in the afternoon will help you [get a better night's sleep](#), according to the National Sleep Foundation. Experts say that walking may boost levels of the feel-good hormone serotonin, which relaxes you. Or, the rise in body temperature brought on by walking may signal the brain to lower your temperature later, which promotes sleep. (Avoid a walk two hours before bed—that's too late to cool down.)

### 4. It cuts down on aches and pains

Walk the "chi" (pronounced chee) way and you could have fewer achy days. Nine years ago, Danny Dreyer, an ultra-marathoner then living near San Francisco, invented [ChiWalking](#), which incorporates ideas from tai chi, yoga, and Pilates. It looks like regular walking but, because you consciously relax, improve the alignment of your body, and involve arm movements, puts less stress on the legs while you walk. That means fewer aches. "ChiWalking can cut down any risk of injury," says Alice Peters Diffely, a ChiWalking instructor in Portland, Oregon. "Your whole body will feel better."

### 5. It makes you happy

Walking can relieve [depression](#), anxiety, and stress. Just one 30-minute walk may make you feel better when you're down, University of Texas researchers found. Head out for 90 minutes five times a week and you'll get the biggest boost, according to a new study from Temple University. One possible explanation: Walking helps the body produce endorphins, the mood-boosting chemicals linked to "runner's high."

### 6. It keeps you slimmer

Walking for 30 minutes a day can prevent weight gain in most people who are physically inactive, according to another Duke study. And researchers from Brown University and the University of Pittsburgh showed that women who walked for an hour five days a week and consumed 1,500 calories a day lost and kept off 25 pounds over the course of a year. The reason walking helps control your weight: It's easy! "The harder the exercise is, the less people will do it," says Johnny Benjamin, MD, chairman of the department of orthopedics at Indian River Medical Center in Vero Beach, Fla.

### 7. It staves off senior moments

Several studies in older people suggest that walking—even for as little as 45 minutes a week—helps ward off [Alzheimer's disease](#). Regular strolls are also linked to mental sharpness in seniors. But regardless of your age, walking is likely to help keep your mind active, Dr. Benjamin says—particularly if you stroll with friends; walking while talking is a

surefire brain booster.

### **8. It protects your bones**

Just 30 minutes of walking three times a week does wonders to prevent and treat thinning bones. This kind of exercise, which uses 95 percent of your muscles, actually pushes your bones to get stronger so they can handle the load. "Walking," Look says, "is not just for cardio."

By Lambeth Hochwald

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#### **Related Links:**

[How to Watch for Breast Cancer Symptoms](#)

[5 Ways to Cut Your Breast Cancer Risk](#)

[Is Nordic Walking a Better Way to Walk?](#)

[How Safe, Moderate Exercise Can Keep Your Heart Healthy](#)

[Walk This Way](#)

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**btinshacker**

1234

**Steve**

Great information. Now, how can we get people out there to walk? I think it has to be automatic, something that people do not have to think about. I use a treadmill desk. All day. I have no option. Either I stand there at work or I walk and walking feels much better and more natural. The best treadmill desk I have seen is the TrekDesk at <http://www.trekdesk.com>. We were designed to walk, not sit all day. Give it a try.

**Tia**

How do I find a Chi Walking group in my area?  
I live in Palo Alto, CA

### **Sean Kelley**

Hi Tia: You might try <http://www.chiwalking.com/> or <http://www.exercisefriends.com>.

Good luck.

### **faezeh**

plaease tell me different ways to reduse STRESS and pressures,

### **Asim Kumar Bandyopadhyay**

The information provided is very useful indeed. I am gaining weight and it is stubborn. I will in through the chi walking.

### **Jerry Johnson**

All exercese is inportant so u can live longer and stay in shape so you can have a healthy body and strong muscles so you can move around with out any pain

### **Jerry Johnson**

stay fit

### **Linda Marie**

I love walking/jogging outside even though I belong to a gym. I really wish there was some way I could get support or find other walkers in my area.

### **Sean Kelley**

Hi Linda,

You might try ExerciseFriends.com. They're a partner of our s with our Girls Gotta Move running program and they connect exercisers by zip code.

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5