

Why Walking is Wonderful

Adapted from *Arthritis Today*[®], the health magazine published by the Arthritis Foundation.

Walking is the ultimate easy-to-do, good-for-you exercise. You don't need special gear, you can go with friends or solo, stay indoors or venture outdoors, and, best of all for those with tender knees, you can do it at your own pace. Start slowly - try for three 10-minute outings a day at first - and add speed, hills and longer distances as your endurance and strength builds.

If you haven't already begun a walking program, here are 10 good reasons why you should.

1. **Walking improves circulation.** It wards off heart disease, brings up heart rate, lowers blood pressure and strengthens the heart. One study showed that postmenopausal women who walked just 1 to 2 miles a day lowered blood pressure by nearly 11 points in 24 weeks. Women who walked 30 minutes a day reduced their risk of stroke by 20 percent - and 40 percent when they stepped up the pace.
2. **Walking lowers the risk of fractures.** Any exercise that places your body's weight on your legs helps build stronger bones. In one study, women who walked 30 minutes a day reduced their risk of hip fractures by 40 percent.
3. **Walking supports joints.** It tones muscles that, in turn, support the joints. Strong leg, abdominal and lower back muscles take the burden off knees and lower-body joints.
4. **Walking improves sleep.** In a study of women age 50 to 75, those who took one-hour morning walks were more likely to relieve insomnia than women who didn't walk.
5. **Walking slows mental decline.** One study of 6,000 women, age 65 and older, found that age-related memory decline was lower in those who walked more.
6. **Walking lowers Alzheimer's risk.** One study showed that men between the ages of 71 and 93 who walked more than a quarter of a mile a day had half the incidence of dementia and Alzheimer's disease compared with those who walked less.
7. **Walking lightens mood.** Research shows that walking 30 minutes a day may boost mood faster than antidepressants do. Why? Walking releases natural pain-killing endorphins into the body.
8. **Walking burns calories.** When you burn more calories than you consume, you'll lose weight, which has benefits of its own, including less stress on painful joints.
9. **Walking brings you closer.** Walking is a good way to spend time with friends or family members and enjoy nature.
10. **Walking is economical.** A good pair of shoes is all you really need - no expensive lessons, gear or gym memberships. Just get moving!