

# WALKING



“OF ALL EXERCISE,” commented Thomas Jefferson about 200 years ago, “walking is best.” Walking has long been a favorite pastime of Americans. Walking is effective, safe, free exercise.

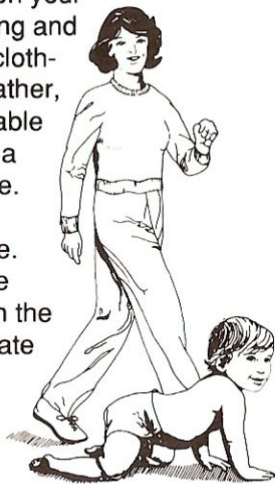
Contrary to the misleading fitness axiom of recent years, “no pain, no gain,” walking provides all of the benefits of more strenuous exercise. As with jogging, walking benefits the whole body, but proper walking does not inflict stress on the legs, ankles, feet, spine, and heart as jogging can. While running is a natural human activity, there are two principle problems with jogging as it is done in modern America—runners wear shoes, and they usually run on the hard surfaces of roads or tracks.

Walking is appropriate exercise for persons of all ages. Everyone who can get up and move about can benefit from a program of proper walking. The secret to gaining maximum benefit from walking is that it be done correctly.

## How To Walk

Walking from the chair in front of the TV set to the refrigerator is not what we mean by walking. Walking is an activity of the whole body, not just the legs—it can be more than merely a mode of locomotion. The first consideration before setting out on your walk should be your clothing and shoes. Wear loose-fitting clothing appropriate for the weather, and correct-fitting comfortable shoes. Walking should be a relaxed, natural experience. Leave your tape player or radio with headset at home. The benefits of walking are dramatically reduced when the brain is forced to concentrate on intrusive sounds.

Take comfortable-length strides—do not shorten or lengthen your



stride to match another person's. Walk tall. Be relaxed, hold your head high, keep your shoulders back, and your back straight. Begin slowly and increase your speed and distance gradually to suit your own level of stamina.

When walking, your individual pace should be just fast enough to increase your pulse rate to about 120 beats per minute. This provides the beneficial aerobic effects of running or jogging without placing an undue strain on the cardiovascular system.

Your arms should be allowed to swing freely at your sides—more benefit is gained from walking when you are not carrying anything or resting your hands in your pockets. When your arms swing freely at your sides,

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the internal communication that keeps your body functioning properly is improved. As your right arm swings forward when you step out with your left foot, and vice versa, your arms act as a natural balancing device for your body. This “opposite arm and leg” action is termed contralateral movement. And it is contralateral exercise that helps to re-time and re-balance your body and to improve internal body communication. Dangling arms and a shuffling gait can indicate impaired body communication that can lead to both diminished nerve response and disease. When the arms are not allowed to swing naturally in walking, a coordination problem can develop, normal nerve response can become impaired, and, as this situation continues, disease and organ dysfunction can follow.

Walking upright with contralateral movement is a natural progression from the cross-crawl motion we learn as infants. Babies who are confined to play pens often skip the crawling stage and go directly to walking. Although this may be gratifying to parents who are impressed by their child's talents, the child misses a vital part of his neurological development process. Similarly, infants who are placed in walkers at an early age and encouraged to walk are deprived of beneficial crawling exercise.

Crawling is essential to the proper development of a child's neurological system. Research results indicate a close association between crawling and learning abilities, behavioral patterns, and overall health.

## The Benefits of Walking

Walking is an invigorating exercise that is stimulating but not stressful to the body's natural rhythm. Brisk walking relaxes and tones the lower back muscles that are associated with the diaphragm, and walking can positively affect the symptoms of a hiatus hernia. This mild but effective form of exercise also promotes proper function of the lungs, stomach, cardiovascular and elimination systems. In addition to toning muscles, walking improves the circulation that transports oxygen to all parts of the body, including the brain.

Many patients who have suffered with frequent headaches find relief after engaging in a regular program of walking. Whether leaning over a desk or concentrating on a production line, many modern-day Americans spend much of their day with their head bent down. Over time, this position causes neck strain. Striding forward with a purpose and head held high can offset the negative effects of a day spent with your head and neck in a necessary but stressful position. Although headaches can be attributed to this posture, walking often helps to reduce their frequency.

Exercise can be a dynamic force for creative thinking—it has been termed “meditation in motion.” Albert Einstein is said to have found his walks around the Princeton campus helpful in formulating his theories, and Emerson is credited with recording thoughts generated during his walks. Erasmus, a 16th century philosopher, offered advice relevant throughout the ages: “Before supper, walk a little. After supper, do the same.”

By following a few simple guidelines, you won't stress your body or “overdo” by walking. You should be able to carry on a conversation while walking; you should experience no pain from walking; and you should not feel excessively fatigued or tired after walking. ♦



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