

House Calls

by Rikki Schuster, PA-C

These boots are made for walking...okay; these sneakers are made for walking is more like it. Don't you think it's about time you get out in the fresh air and take a nice brisk walk? Over the past several years, multiple medical studies have proven that exercise can protect you against many diseases and actually prolong your life.

How much exercise will help you live longer? Research suggests that as little as thirty minutes of daily exercise such as walking can make a difference. A regular walking program can reduce blood cholesterol, lower blood pressure, increase your cardiovascular endurance, increase bone strength, and even reduce the risk of certain kinds of cancers including breast, colon and prostate.

All you need to start a walking program are comfortable clothes and the right pair of shoes. You should get your health care provider's consent before starting if you have been sedentary, you smoke, or you have chronic health problems. Once you are ready to go, plan out a route and hit the streets or beach, or walking trail.

You should begin every walking workout with a brief warm-up and a few simple stretches. Walking primarily works the major leg muscles, but don't forget to stretch your back, shoulders, and arms as well. Doing so will help relieve any tension you may have and make your walk more enjoyable and more effective.

If you are a beginner, you should make your workout less strenuous by limiting how fast and far you walk. Try walking short distances, maybe a five-minute stroll, then gradually increase your distance and pace weekly. Walk at a comfortable pace, focusing on your posture, keeping your head up, your shoulders relaxed, swing-

ing your arms naturally, and breathing deeply. Be sure you can talk while you are walking; if you are unable to talk, you need to slow down. You can start to vary the intensity of your walk once you can walk two to three miles with ease. At that time, you may be able to incorporate hill walking, or increasing your speed. A few minutes of relaxing stretching is a great way to cool down after your walk, and will help you to avoid sore muscles.

Some people find that walking for exercise may become monotonous after a while. There are several ways to make your walking workout more fun. For example, find a friend who would also like to start a walking routine, and make it a social hour. Although walking solo can be a welcomed time of peacefulness, many people enjoy walking regularly with a partner, the time tends to go by much faster, and you don't even realize you are exercising. Listening to audiotapes while walking, either listening to lively music, or books on tape, is a great way to pass the time. If you do wear headphones though, be sure to keep the volume down and watch out for traffic.

It's always a good idea to keep a log of your walking time and distance. This will keep you honest, and help you track your progress. You can then see in black and white when you reach your exercise goals.

Many experts recommend you work up to walking at least thirty minutes every day. That can mean two 15 minute walks, or even hour long walks two to three times a week. The best schedule is one that keeps you walking and keeps you fit. Fitting walking into your schedule whenever you can is the key to sticking with it.

In general, people tend to feel so much better once they stick with a walking routine; the hardest

part is just getting started. Getting out in the beautiful autumn air of the Outer Banks should be inspiration enough to dig out your sneakers and hit the ground walking!

Rikki Schuster, PA-C is a certified physician assistant with 9 years of emergency medicine and urgent care experience. She is currently practicing with 'Medical House Calls' and will come to your home, work, school, rental cottage or hotel for evaluation and treatment of minor medical illnesses. Call 252-475-2007 for more information.