

Exercise & Physical Activity Awareness Month

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Americans falling behind in daily activity

Researchers are finding that pedometers (which calculate daily steps) are reliable tools for estimating activity levels of adults. Several countries have now conducted this type of research and the results indicate that US adults are falling behind the rest of the world. Not only is our average of 5117 steps per day well below the recommended 10,000 steps per day, it also ranks below the activity levels reported by Switzerland (9650), Australia (9695), Japan (7168), and Canada (5900). There is one race we seem to be winning, however. Of the countries listed above, the US ranks first in obesity (34% of adults). The two statistics are undoubtedly linked. A few other noteworthy results from the study:

- Males walked more daily steps than females
- Younger adults walked more steps than older adults
- Obese adults walked fewer steps than non-obese adults

So it looks like **Dr. Ken Cooper**, director of The Cooper Institute and originator of the term ‘aerobics’ was spot on when he said many years ago, that “Americans need to start walking their dogs, whether they have one or not!”

Measuring Exercise Intensity

By now you understand that your goal is to incorporate 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise into your day, 5 days per week. But what is “moderate intensity exercise”? Sure, if you’re tech-savvy, you could buy a heart rate monitor and calculate your target heart rate, but there is an even easier method.

An easy way to measure relative intensity is to use the “talk test.” If you’re working at a moderate intensity you should be able to maintain a breathy conversation with an exercise partner. You shouldn’t be gasping for air, but you shouldn’t be able to sing your favorite top-40 hit either. Remember that as you improve your fitness, you will be able to move faster at a given intensity, so using the talk test will be more helpful for maintaining your effort than monitoring your speed.

Overcoming Fitness Barriers

Are you having trouble sticking to your exercise routine? You’re not alone. The Mayo Clinic has some helpful tips on how to overcome some of the most commonly reported barriers to exercise.

- **“I don’t have enough time.”**
Break your workouts into 10 minute bouts, get up earlier, take the far parking spot, or reassess your routine.
- **“Exercise is boring.”**
Do something you enjoy, vary your exercise, or work out with a friend.
- **“I’m self-conscious about my appearance.”**
Start at home, remember that the benefits outweigh temporary discomfort.
- **“I’m too tired after a long day at work.”**
Try exercising in the morning, use your lunch break, plan ahead, or go to sleep earlier.
- **“I’m just lazy.”**
Set realistic expectations, workout when you feel the most energetic, schedule exercise like you would an important appointment.
- **“I’m not athletic.”**
Exercise doesn’t have to be complicated, try walking.
- **“I’ve tried and failed in the past.”**
Pace yourself, set realistic goals, remember your reasons for exercising.

Guidelines for Starting an Exercise Program

Your exercise goal should be to reach that recommended 30 minutes/day, 5 days per week, but don’t be overwhelmed. With some dedication and planning, you’ll be there before you know it. Exercise is Medicine, an initiative of the American College of Sports Medicine, suggests these guidelines for jumping into exercise:

- Set aside time each day to exercise: *Starting is the hardest part of beginning an exercise program. Scheduling it into your day and making it a priority will help you take the plunge.*
- Choose cardiovascular exercises you enjoy: *Walk, run, swim, bike, play basketball; add variety to your routine. Choose activities you love and you’ll be more likely to stick with it.*
- Start with 10-15 minutes of cardiovascular exercise per day and increase that by 5 minutes each week until you reach your 30 minute goal: *If your goals are weight loss you may need to set your goal at 60 - 90 minutes/day.*
- Incorporate strength training into your routine: *Add 8-12 reps of 10 exercises twice a week.*

http://www.exercisemedicine.org/documents/StartingExercise_8.pdf <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/measuring/index.html>
[http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness/SM00085_D; Bassett et al.\(2010\) MSSE 42:10](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness/SM00085_D; Bassett et al.(2010) MSSE 42:10)