

Extension

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Newsletter

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Let's Take a Walk!

*Kaye Kasza, Family and Consumer Science Agent
Colorado State University Extension, Southeast Area*

Spring is a great time to break out the shoes and take a walk. Walking is the most natural and affordable exercise you can do. It does not require any special skills. It is safe, free, requires no special equipment and costs nothing to get started.

Walking with children has many benefits. You teach them to enjoy regular exercise. Spending quality time together makes your family closer.



Physical activity provides both mental and physical health benefits. Walking is one of the most effective forms of exercise to achieve heart health. Walking will help you:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Prevent or manage various conditions, including heart disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes
- Strengthen your bones
- Lift your mood
- Improve your balance and coordination

To gain the most health benefits, aim for at least 150 minutes each week of moderate activity. Thirty minutes a day, five times a week is an easy goal to remember. Three 10-minute segments each day give the same benefits and may fit your schedule better.

Tips for Success:

As you start your walking routine, remember to:

- **Check with your doctor** if you have serious health issues. Talk to your doctor if you're a male over 40 or a female over 50 or you've been inactive for a while.
- **Get the right gear.** Choose shoes with proper arch support, a firm heel and thick flexible soles to cushion your feet and absorb shock. If you walk outdoors when it's dark, wear bright colors or reflective tape for visibility.
- **Choose your course carefully.** If you'll be walking outdoors, avoid paths with cracked sidewalks, potholes, low-hanging limbs or uneven turf.
- **Warm up.** Walk slowly for five to 10 minutes to warm up your muscles and prepare your body for exercise.
- **Aim for at least 30 minutes** of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, 5 days a week. Remember that physical activity can be accumulated throughout the day. Three 10-minute sessions is the same as one 30-minute session! Aim for 60-90 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day if you're looking to lose weight.

- **Stand up straight.** Always keep your hips directly under your upper body. Keep your head up and look ahead of you, not at the ground.
- **Cool down.** At the end of your walk, walk slowly for five to 10 minutes to help your muscles cool down.
- **Stretch.** After you cool down, gently stretch your muscles. If you'd rather stretch before you walk, remember to warm up first.

If you are new to walking, start off with slow, short sessions. Start by walking for 10 minutes and then walk back. Do this each day for a week. Then add 5 minutes to each walk the next week. Keep adding 5 minutes until you are walking as long as desired. You can increase intensity and raise your activity level by gradually increasing your speed.

Remember, something is better than nothing. If you can't fit in 30 minutes of walking, do what you can. Don't give up when you've missed a day of walking.

Let's Talk

Let children know that walking improves the physical and mental health of everyone who walks. Suggest a brisk walk before they tackle a hard homework assignment. Offer a walk as the reward for completing a task. As you walk, work to keep young children's interest up by planning different routes. Include points of interest like a stream or playground, identify wildlife, or teach them to use a sports watch to time splits, distance, etc. Make it fun to take a walk with Mom or Dad. Lead by example, by talking positively about how you enjoy walking and other forms of physical activity.

Recipe for Health:

After-School Strawberry Shake

After your after-school walk with your children, make this nutritious snack together. Spring is a great time to enjoy fresh strawberries. They are in-season so the cost is lower than other times of the year.

- 1 pint strawberries, hulled
- 3 whole strawberries for garnish
- 2 medium bananas, peeled and cut into 1 inch chunks
- ½ cup strawberry or plain fat-free yogurt
- ½ cup orange juice
- 1 tsp honey
- 3 cups ice cubes

In a blender, combine all the ingredients except 1 ½ cups of the ice cubes and puree until smooth. Add remaining ice; blend until smooth. Pour into tall glasses and garnish with whole strawberries.

Recipe courtesy of Fruits and Veggies More Matters.

