

## Get in Step

Written by RealAge, Inc., peer-reviewed by Dr. Axel Goetz, November 2004

"Walking saved my life."

So say many walking enthusiasts who picked up the habit and as a result either reduced their risk of disease, lost weight, beat depression, or enjoyed countless other major health rewards.

Although you may not be surprised to know that walking is considered a superior health habit, it might surprise you to learn just how much research has confirmed the far-reaching and diverse health benefits that regular walkers experience.

Some doctors and scientists even believe that walking regularly can reverse illness and aging, making the simple act of walking quite possibly the most underrated prescription for good health.

Read on to discover the long list of health wishes that walking can fulfill for you.

### 1. I wish I had more energy.

A short brisk walk has both a calming and an energizing effect, according to research. And walking may help you feel more alert and well-rested because of its ability to improve the quality of your sleep. Walking at a moderate pace later in the day can help encourage deep, restful sleep. Finally, the mood boost you experience from walking may further enhance your energy levels.

Walking toward a good night's sleep.

In a study, people who walked more than 6 blocks per day reduced their sleep problems by one third. Using a "brisk" pace cut their sleep problems in half.

### 2. I wish I could think more clearly.

Need to sort out some things in your head? Few activities help improve your perspective as quickly as a brisk walk, which will boost circulation in all parts of the body, including your brain.

Some research also has shown that walking is associated with less cognitive decline and a reduced risk of dementia later in life.

In addition to improving cognitive function, walking regularly can help you handle stressful situations and help you remain in control of your emotions, which clears the path for straight thinking.

### 3. I wish I could protect myself from my parents' diseases.

Your genetics determine only a small part of your health profile. Research shows it's how you live your life that really counts, and walking regularly can prevent and improve many serious chronic diseases.

Here is a short list of ways that walking can reduce the impacts of disease. Moderately intense activities such as walking can:

- Reduce cardiovascular disease by as much as 30-50 percent.
- Decrease osteoarthritis pain, and improve stability, endurance, and agility.
- Reduce the risk of colon cancer and possibly breast cancer.
- Protect against diabetes in high-risk people, and lower blood glucose and improve insulin action in diabetics.
- Lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart attack.

#### 4. I wish I could lose weight.

Although you might think that losing weight is the only way to enjoy an improved health profile, the truth is that regular walkers may not have to worry quite as much about what the scale says. Studies show that thin, sedentary

Find a walking event or walking club in your area in the American Volkssport Association (AVA) listings.

people may have more markers of heart disease risk than overweight people who exercise regularly.

Nonetheless, losing weight is a great way to improve your health profile and walking can help you accomplish this goal. Walking will increase the number of calories you burn each day and can boost your muscle mass, which in turn helps your body burn more calories throughout the day, not just while you are exercising.

#### 5. I wish I felt happier in general.

Protecting and nurturing your mental health is an important part of overall wellness, and studies show that walking regularly

has the ability to lower your stress levels. Also, studies show that aerobic exercise such as walking may bring long-term benefits to your mental disposition by warding off both depression and anxiety.

#### Steps toward better health

No other prescription for your health is as free and easy as walking. It can even equal more vigorous forms of exercise in terms of its ability to improve your health profile. And it's easier on your body, especially your joints, than activities such as running. Do you know of any medicine that has greater benefits for your health and well being?

#### Don't think you have the time to walk?

Just take a short walk in the morning and another at lunch or after work. Physical activity can be accumulated over the course of a day rather than all in one session, and it doesn't have to result in weight loss to have health benefits.

So start where you are and gradually increase the amount of time you spend walking. You'll gradually be granting yourself some very key health wishes in the process.

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