



TO YOUR HEALTH



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WALKING YOUR WAY TO HEALTH

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

The best part of deciding to walk for health is that we already know how to do it! As Andrew Weil says, "You can do it anywhere, it requires no equipment, it carries the least risk of injury, it can provide a complete workout, equal to or better than other activity, and it will satisfy all your exercise requirements", (*8 Weeks to Optimum Health*, NY: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1997). The main advantage to walking is that just about anyone can do it. This is not to say that other kinds of exercise are not important but to highlight walking as a type of movement that is accessible to most people.

Walking for 10 minutes a day, on most days, for several weeks can be the beginning of a new habit that can be achieved even by those who have not been exercising. Summer is the perfect time to get "hooked" on the walking habit. After a few weeks of 10 minutes, the time can be increased to 15, then 20 minutes. A daily 30 minute walk is a realistic goal.

The benefits of walking are many and are familiar to most of us. A newly reported study at the University of North Carolina followed a group of people who ranged in age from 18 to 30 over a time span of 15 years. They gained an average of 2.2 pounds of weight per year. However, the more they walked, the more likely they were to lose weight and maintain their loss, (*Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter*, March 2009). While this may not be surprising, little research has actually substantiated the relationship between walking and weight.

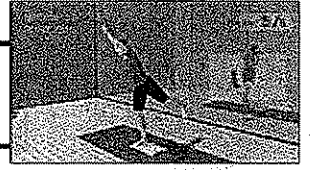
A brisk 30 minute walk also is recommended to build healthy hips and prevent

fractures. Bones react positively to the stress of exercise and build themselves up, (*The Cleveland Clinic Arthritis Advisor*, March 2009). The weight-bearing effect of walking stimulates bone growth, an important task in the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis, a condition that causes thinning of the bones. Thin bones increase the risk of fractures when a person falls. Walking not only promotes bone strength but strengthens the hips and legs and in so doing, may improve balance and prevent falling.

Strong, flexible legs can ward off the pain and limitations of arthritic knees. Unless the knees are painful, walking is beneficial, and there is no evidence that walking will lead to a worsening of arthritis. In fact, exercise is recommended to avoid stiffness and immobility. However, it may be necessary to use a cane or walker. A recent Australian study showed that the use of a cane can reduce knee adduction (the collapsing of the knee towards the midline of the body) by more than 20% (*The Cleveland Clinic Advisor*, August 2008). The study participants tended to walk more slowly while using a cane, but they had greater stride length and improved pelvis control which alleviated the load on the arthritic knee.

Our heart benefits from walking just as much as our hips and knees. As an aerobic activity, walking exercises our circulatory system and our heart. It helps those with lungs conditions by expanding the lungs and facilitating a healthy exchange of air. But less is known about the effect of exercise on fatigue, especially the fatigue that follows the treatment and radiation of cancer.

Of all the various treatments that have

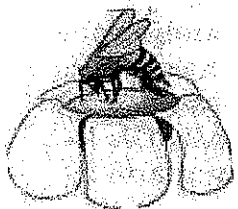


been recommended for fatigue, exercise stands out as the only effective means to combat fatigue. In fact, to overcome fatigue, pushing oneself, rather than pacing oneself, is now thought to be the best approach, (*Cachexia & Fatigue*, Eduardo Bruera, MD, Palliative Care Update 2009, Maine Medical Center). Walking initially can be done for as short a period of time as necessary, perhaps for only 2 to 3 minutes. Gradually and consistently, the time is increased. Obviously, recuperation varies with each individual and depends upon the nature of the condition that has caused the fatigue. Yet one cannot help but speculate that an exercise such as walking, by virtue of physical movement, exerts a positive effect on the emotional well-being of a person.

The relationship between emotional and physical health is well established even though it's not clear exactly how the connections are made. Certainly physical exercise positively influences our emotions. Is it the concentration on the physical movements that frees the mind? Or is it the quiet of a walk that allows us to be free from troubled thoughts? Walking can be meditative, healing and freeing. Or it can be just fun and a chance to laugh with a good friend. No matter what it is for us now, the walking habit has the potential to improve both our physical *and* our emotional health. Its benefits may be far-reaching and surprising...

*How could the patient pine have known
The morning breeze would come,
Or humble flowers anticipate
The insect's noonday hum...*

Thoreau



WII GET FIT

by Muire Flynn

Wii, pronounced "we", is a virtual gaming system introduced by Nintendo in 2006 that changed gaming world fans from couch potatoes to physically active participants. One might ask, how does this interest older adults, other than to watch grandchildren play yet one more video game. Well, the Wii console comes loaded with games like tennis, baseball, golf, boxing and bowling. The games are played with hand held controllers that the player must physically move to duplicate the activity required for play.

Wii Fit, released in 2008, includes 40 activities and a virtual personal trainer to guide players through activities for building strength, balance and aerobic endurance, and practicing yoga all with an emphasis in developing the muscles of the core of the player. Core muscles, referred to as the powerhouse, stabilize the body as it moves, contributing to improved balance and agility.

The Wii has inspired a number of studies on how the games can improve physical conditions that are more prevalent with aging, like osteoporosis, Parkinson's Disease and debilitating falls. The results are promising so, for those of us who have viewed video games negatively, let this be an opportunity to engage in a new and exciting form of fitness.

Best Buy, Inc. generously donated a Wii Fit System for the Pump Up Your Brain Fair that took place at CWV in April. The Fitness Department with the assistance of Jason Williams, our intern from Bridgewater State College, will be launching a program in July to engage Residents in Wii. Stay tuned for further information as the project unfolds.