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WALKING is the easiest form of exercise. It allows you to easily maintain your physical health and even improve it.

For instance, if you do just 30 minutes of brisk walking a day, you will increase your cardiovascular fitness level, strengthen your bones, reduce your body's excess fat, and even tone up your muscles.

Best of all, you won't require any special equipment to do it with!

It is often overlooked as a form of exercise, yet it is ideal for all ages and fitness levels. Many studies show that regular walking can reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma, stroke and some cancers.

Getting started

The beauty of walking as an exercise is that you can engage in it at any time of the day. However, as with any physical activity, you should use the appropriate gear for it, which in this case is nothing more than loose comfortable clothing and a pair of comfortable shoes.

As long as your shoes can provide your feet with adequate support and do not cause you any discomfort or blisters, you are good to go.

Set a target for yourself by aiming for 10,000 steps a day, which is roughly equivalent to an hour of brisk walking or approximately eight kilometres.

You can even opt to break this up into two 30-minute sessions, if you prefer.

This is not an impossible figure to achieve as most people average around 3,000 to 4,000 steps a day.

Remember, every step counts, so start accumulating your number of steps. It will require a little more effort on your part but the benefits will definitely be worth it.

Achieving your target

A simple method to keep track of the number of steps taken is with a device called a pedometer or step counter. Basic pedometers are relatively inexpensive and can help you keep track of your step count easily, thus making it easier for you to gauge your progress throughout the day.

There are even numerous apps available for smartphone users to help you keep count of the number of steps you have taken.

Some apps may even connect you to a community of people who can motivate you to be more active. For example, the MapMyHike app not only helps to track your pace, movement, distance and calories burned, it also enables you to share your hiking adventures with friends, or even start a little friendly competition.

So, how can you go about achieving this target? For starters, you will need to make walking a habit.

Here are some of the things you can actively do in order to make yourself walk more:

- Park further from your destination – far too many Malaysians take pride in being able to find a parking spot right in front of the door!

- Instead, try to find a safe parking spot that is located at some distance from wherever you are going, be it to your workplace, out for a meal, or even when you go out with your family to a shopping mall.

- Take the stairs whenever possible – are you going up to the next floor? Take the stairs instead of the lift or escalator.

If your fitness level is sufficient, you can even take the stairs up multiple floors to reach your destination.

- Drive less – many office workers love to carpool to go out for lunch; if your destination is not too far away, leave your car behind and just take a walk. After all, walking is also a great form of after-meal exercise.

A walk towards health

Walking is often overlooked as a form of exercise, yet it is the ideal exercise for people of all ages and fitness levels.



Many studies show that regular walking can reduce the risk of diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and even some cancers. — Filepic

The same principle applies wherever you are, be it at home or abroad, and if you are vacationing, walking around affords you the best opportunity to fully experience the place that you are in as you will be able to see so much more of the locale.

- Take a stroll after meals – make it a point to take a stroll with your family, friends or colleagues after that heavy meal. Not only will it help with your digestion, but it also helps you spend more quality time with them.

By following the tips above, you will find yourself so much closer to achieving your daily target.

Intensity of walking

Just like any other exercise, you can select the intensity of your walk in order to determine the amount of workout you will get out of it.

A low-intensity walking session would involve walking short distances or for short durations at a slow pace, for instance, taking a leisurely stroll in the local park after dinner or walking back to your office after lunch.

A moderate-intensity walking session, for example, brisk walking, is more strenuous as your heart rate will be elevated and you will start sweating. Ideally, you should not be out of breath and still be able to talk easily.

Remember, you should start your walk at a comfortable pace until your body feels limber before hitting your top walking speed. This will help prevent any injuries.

Always stretch your muscles prior to starting and after finishing your walk. This will go a long way toward improving your flexibility.

If you are out of shape and can only manage a brisk walk for a few minutes, don't overdo it. As long as walking does not interfere with your breathing or cause you any undue discomfort, keep at it.

You can even break up your brisk walks into 10-minute blocks and spread them out throughout the day instead of going for an hour-long walk.

As you near the end of your walk, you should gradually slow your pace to allow your body and muscles to cool down.

Challenging yourself

If you find that the route you are on is no longer challenging enough, you can increase the difficulty by:

- Walking uphill or upstairs (especially tall buildings with easy stairwell access)
- Walking with weights or while carrying a backpack (an easy way to add weight is by carrying bottles of water)

- Increasing your walking speed and maintaining it for longer periods

- Increasing your walking distance

You may also want to add a little variety by mixing things up every once in a while. You can do this with a little planning – look for local trails or parks where you can bring your family or meet your friends.

You could even combine such an outing with a picnic in order to make things more fun.

Here are some other ideas to consider:

- Arrange a walking session with family/friends.

- Organise office activities with your colleagues to encourage walking; this could be along the lines of an inter-departmental walking challenge to see which departments take the most steps a day or planning

a walkathon-cum-family day event.

- Race against your own walking time; you can do this by timing how long it takes you to walk a certain distance or route and then trying to beat your own time.

- Be adventurous and try different routes or paths; instead of taking your normal path, try something new, such as going to another park, walking along new trails, or walking in a different part of your neighbourhood.

Even walking the same route at a different time of day or in reverse can break the monotony.

- Turn your walks into treasure hunts.

So, what are you waiting for? Let's start making walking a part of your everyday life today.

All you have to do is just put on your walking shoes, step outdoors and discover the fun and goodness of walking.

Even if you cannot manage 10,000 steps a day, you are still encouraged to walk as much as you can.

This is a simple and free exercise that you can do every day, and every step you take counts, for it will lead you toward better health.

Dr Zawiah Hashim and Dr Chin Yit Siew are members of the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO). This article is contributed by Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2016, an annual community nutrition education initiative jointly-organised by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Dietitians' Association and Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity. For more information on healthy eating and active lifestyle, visit www.nutritionmonth-malaysia.org.my or Nutrition Month Malaysia Facebook page for more info.