



## PHYSICAL THERAPISTS OFFER TIPS FOR AVOIDING INJURY WHILE WALKING FOR EXERCISE

ALEXANDRIA, VA. Whether taking a leisurely weekend stroll or participating in one of the many charity Walk-a-thons occurring over the next five months, there are several preventative measures to take to avoid discomfort, pain and injury while walking, says the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA). APTA ([www.apta.org](http://www.apta.org)) has just published a free walking brochure, "Walking for Exercise," that includes a physical health checklist, information on purchasing proper footwear, how to take your pulse, safety tips and a walking log. Walking is the perfect low-impact exercise for developing and maintaining overall fitness," says Teresa Schuemann, PT, SCS. The director of physical therapy at Skyline Hospital in White Salmon, WA and an APTA member, Schuemann notes that Europeans take an average of 8,000 steps a day, compared to Americans, who lag far behind with only 3,000 steps a day. "I advise my patients to use a pedometer and aim for between 8,000 and 10,000 steps a day," she says. The benefits of a consistent walking program go far beyond increasing your fitness level, notes Schuemann. "Walking is associated with a reduced risk of heart attack and type 2 diabetes, as well as increased energy and muscle tone, stress reduction and weight control," she says.

### SIMPLE STEPS FOR WALKERS

Getting started is the most crucial aspect of any walking regimen, says Schuemann. "For walkers 50 years and older, in particular, it is important to first review overall general physical health with a qualified physician before beginning any exercise program," she says. "Pre-existing medical conditions, such as high blood pressure or bone and joint aches, will negatively impact any exercise program -- even walking -- and need to be addressed before starting. Schuemann points out that there are several factors involved to help make a walking exercise regimen successful:

- **Pace yourself.** Start slow and easy, gradually building up to your pace and distance. You should be able to maintain a "conversational" pace – one that enables you to hold a normal conversation while walking without feeling winded.
- **Shoe sense.** Initially, purchase walking shoes at a professional shoe store, where trained staff can fit your exact type of foot. For example, a high arch will require a shoe with more cushion; a flat foot will need more arch support.
- **Proper gait.** Your own particular style of walking, or gait, determines the distribution of the stress to various parts of your legs and feet. If you are experiencing discomfort – particularly back pain, kneecap pain, legs cramps or a sore Achilles tendon – it may be the result of a gait problem and should be analyzed by a physical therapist.
- **Hydrate.** As with all sports, hydration should be maintained - drink comfortably and don't let thirst be your guide. Amounts vary depending on weather and walking conditions; sipping 8-12 oz. of water every 30 minutes from a hydration pack or water bottle stored in a fanny pack is recommended.

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