

June 2018

## Walking for Wellness

*Increasing the duration and intensity of daily walking helps you stay fit, and it's good for your joints.*

What is one habit that the longest lived people in the world have in common? They walk a lot as a routine part of their daily lives.

We all walk, simply to get around. But upping the amount and intensity of walking has health benefits. Cleveland Clinic physical therapist Mary Morrison, PT, DScPT, recommends building more walking into your daily routine. And to get the greatest benefits, you need to continue to challenge yourself.

### Benefits of Walking

Walking is good for general wellness. As an aerobic activity, it improves heart health. It has other benefits as well, including for joint health.

“Movement causes the fluids that bathe joints to flow,” says Morrison. The most mobile joints in the body (hips, knees, ankles, shoulders, elbows, fingers, toes) are surrounded by capsules filled with synovial fluid. This fluid provides nutrition and lubrication to the joint. But movement is required for it to circulate across the joint.

“If after sitting for a long time you work your knee up and down before standing up, it hurts less because you’ve increased the circulation of synovial fluid,” Morrison explains. That’s happening when you walk.

Walking can also have a meditative quality that may help with pain control. “Just don’t try to sort out the worries of your day when you walk,” says Morrison. Take full, deep breaths as you walk, and focus on your breath or your pace.

Morrison clarifies that walking



*Walking is an easy exercise that doesn't require any special equipment.*

won't necessarily build muscle, which requires some resistance. And it may not provide enough weight-bearing impact to increase bone mass.

### Getting Started

If you've been relatively inactive, start slowly. If you can walk for only five minutes at a time, that's okay. Just start. Try to build up to walking 30 minutes or more a day on at least five days of the week.

You don't have to walk for 30 minutes all at once. In fact, it's best to **break it up into shorter increments** throughout the day. “Build this into your lifestyle rather than making it a chore,” Morrison suggests. For example, walk to do your errands.

### Intensity Matters

You don't have to run, but try to pick up speed. “Our bodies respond in a healthy way to a challenge,” says Morrison. Walk at a moderately brisk pace that feels like you're working somewhat hard, and yet feels safe.

Continue to increase the challenge over time. “If you walk the same distance at the same intensity every day

### What You Need to Know

- **Start walking at** your comfort level.
- **Gradually increase the** time, speed and difficulty of the walk.
- **You should feel** like you're working somewhat hard.
- **Aim to walk** 30 minutes a day on at least five days a week.
- **Where you walk** doesn't matter: in the park, on the street, at the mall, on a hiking trail, on a treadmill or anywhere that works for you.
- **Use a pedometer** or fitness tracker if it helps to motivate you. Try for 6,000 steps a day.


for a year, it will have less effect,” says Morrison. Practice upping the intensity in intervals. Walk more quickly for 30 seconds followed by two to three minutes at your regular pace. “This may be more effective, overall, than a slow pace for a longer period of time,” says Morrison.

You can also increase the challenge by walking in a hillier area, swinging your arms as you walk or using trekking poles. But Morrison advises against increasing difficulty by adding weights to your ankles.

### Cautions

People with arthritis should walk faster by taking more steps rather than lengthening their stride, which can increase the force on the joints.

If joint pain is preventing you from getting the most out of a walking program, try using a cane held in the hand opposite the side that's painful. Trekking poles can also support sore joints.

People at risk for falling should address balance issues first. Once balance improves, walking can help prevent falls. 



# *your* Health

## Arthritis Intelligence

Surprising facts – and good advice

May is Arthritis Awareness Month, so we surveyed arthritis experts to find out what people often get wrong. Here are four facts about arthritis that might surprise you – and one fact experts agree you *should* know. —MARY ANNE DUNKIN

### 1 Arthritis is not a single disease.

Arthritis – joint inflammation – is a common factor in more than 100 different diseases. The term is often used to refer to joint pain or joint disease, but it is not a formal diagnosis.

### 2 It is not an old age problem.

Although most people associate arthritis with aging, the majority of those who have it – 64 percent – are younger than 65 years old.

### 3 Your pet may share your pain.

Studies show that up to 1 in 4 dogs have degenerative joint disease (osteoarthritis). For cats, the prevalence is even higher; as many as 9 in 10 older cats may be affected.

### 4 Arthritis is costly for the whole country.

Total medical costs and earnings losses due to arthritis in the U.S. in 2013 were \$304 billion – about 1 percent of the gross domestic product.

And here's what experts say you *should* know: Physical activity is an arthritis pain reliever. Study after study has shown the benefits of exercise for arthritis – strengthening muscles that support the joints, increasing energy and improving balance and sleep quality. Many people are concerned that activity will damage their joints, but joints that are not moved become stiffer and more painful. Even moderate exercise can make a big difference in counteracting that.