

Caring for your Spine

Walking

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Interesting Walking Facts

Each foot and ankle contains approximately 30 bones, collectively accounting for over 1% of all bones in the human body. The average individual takes between 5,000 and 10,000 steps per day. Approximately 3.5 times an individual's body weight is loaded onto the foot during each step.

Countless number of nerves lying within the spinal cord, the spinal nerves and the peripheral nerves control the pattern of muscle movements during walking. Because of the repetitive nature of walking orthopedic and neurological problems should be addressed early to help prevent cumulative trauma to the soft tissues and joints of the legs and spine.

Getting Fit by Walking

Regular walking can help you reach any fitness goal including: a healthier life, better muscle tone, easier weight control, and improved aerobic fitness. Fitness improves with exercise using major muscles groups, increasing circulation, increasing oxygen intake, expanding lung capacity, and burning excess calories. To begin a walking program, start slowly. There is no immediate method for reaching your fitness goals. You have a lifetime to work on good health and fitness. Consult a physician prior to beginning any aggressive walking program. Walking is much more preferable than running or jogging because it creates less stress on your spine and extremity joints, including the hips, knees, and ankles.

Evaluating Your Progress in a Walking Program

There are many different ways to measure progress when participating in a regular walking exercise program. One of the easiest ways is to monitor your physical performance by recording the distance walked per unit time. Another effective method is to have periodic assessment of your body mass index (BMI) which takes into account both your height and your weight. Regular evaluation of your resting heart rate is an effective gauge of your cardiovascular fitness level. Your resting heart rate will respond to exercise by becoming slower as the heart is trained to pump more efficiently. Measurement of lung function will also reflect an improved fitness level. Organized walking programs or clubs often offer achievement awards for reaching walking milestones or goals such as the distance covered.

Tips for Healthy Walking

Warm up: Proper stretching prior to walking may help reduce injuries associated with overuse.

Wear proper footwear: A good pair of shoes will give your feet proper support and help reduce the incidence of injury and will

reduce stress on the low back.

Plan when you will walk each day: It will help you develop a regular schedule and avoid excuses for not walking.

Walk with a partner: You will be less likely to skip your walk and it will make the walking more fun.

Keep an exercise log: It will help you keep track of your exercise progress.

Participate in a walking program: Healthcare sponsored walking programs offer many benefits which include achievement awards, educational programs, social events and access to specialized assessment such as gait evaluation, assessment for lower extremity disorders such as pronation, muscle imbalance and leg length inequality which all of which could lead to chronic joint pain.