

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Steve Watson

Step Your Way to Better Health

Maintaining a regular exercise schedule is daunting for many people. However, did you know that you may be able to significantly boost your fitness level through less formal activity? For instance, research shows that simply increasing the number of steps you take each day can dramatically improve health — especially if those steps involve climbing stairs.

Simple Ways to Take More Steps

Rather than wasting gas circling for a parking spot close to your destination, always park your car a few blocks away, or in the farthest side of the lot.

Walk to work, or walk your children to school whenever possible.

Start a lunchtime walking club at work. Rather than eating out, pack a lunch to allow time for walking.

Opt for the stairs over the elevator or escalator whenever possible.

If you are a frequent flier, get in the habit of walking around the terminal during layovers. Also, leave time to walk rather than take electric walkways.

Take up the popular European practice of evening promenades.

If weather prevents walking outside, consider walking up and down a flight of stairs in a public building, or walking around large indoor museums or malls.

Get in the habit of asking friends to meet you for a walk instead of a drink or meal.

Choose to live in a city center if possible. Evidence shows that people who live in cities tend to walk more.

If your destination is too far to walk to, use public transportation, rather than driving. Public transportation typically requires some walking from your bus stop or subway station to your destination.

Wear a pedometer and challenge your friends and family members to see who can cover the most steps each week.



Dr. Watson encourages patients to make strides toward wellness by committing to increase the number of steps they take this month, and opting for taking the stairs rather than elevators or escalators whenever possible. Dr. Watson explains to patients that if they commit to this challenge for one month, the new level of activity is likely to become a long-term habit.

More Steps Ward Off Chronic Disease

Doctors of chiropractic, like Dr. Watson, are concerned about the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease. And, a University of Missouri researcher has reported direct evidence supporting the claim of the Centers for Disease Control that a reduction in daily physical activity, such as the number of steps a person takes, is a cause of chronic diseases. The research team also found that it only takes about two weeks of reduced steps for individuals to start noticing the effects (*JAMA* 2008;299:1261-3).



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“A low level of daily physical activity not only doesn’t help your current health status, it could be the reason you got sick in the first place,” explains Professor Frank Booth. “Our study looked at what happened when a group of individuals reduced their daily physical activity. Our findings indicated that if there is a lack of normal physical activity, a person greatly increases the chances of developing a chronic disease. Previously, we thought that not exercising just wasn’t healthy, but we didn’t think that a lack of activity could cause disease. That assumption was wrong.”

Booth and researchers at the University of Copenhagen conducted two different studies in Copenhagen. In the first study, they asked participants to reduce the number of steps they took per day from 6,000 to 1,400 for three weeks. Researchers instructed participants to use motorized transportation, such as a car or elevator, instead of walking or taking the stairs in every situation possible.

The second study asked participants who were more active, averaging 10,000 steps per day, to reduce their activity to 1,400 steps per day for two weeks. The number of steps the average American adult takes per day is 7,473, although Americans who are inactive typically take about 2,100 steps each day (*JAMA* 2008; 299:1261-3).

At the end of each study, participants were administered a glucose tolerance test, a fat tolerance test, or both. These tests measure how fast the body is able to clear glucose or fat from the bloodstream.

The researchers found that after two weeks of no exercise and very little activity, participants had much higher levels of glucose and fat and took a much longer time to clear the substances from their bloodstreams than before. The longer it takes the body to clear the bloodstream of the sub-

stances, the higher the likelihood that diabetes or other chronic diseases will develop.

“We used to think that it is healthy to be physically active, but this study shows that it is dangerous to be inactive for just a couple of weeks,” comments Bente Klarlund Pedersen, study co-author and professor of internal medicine and director of the Centre of Inflammation and Metabolism at the University of Copenhagen. “After 14 days of reduced stepping, subjects experienced accumulation of the dangerous abdominal fat, while also developing elevated blood-lipids, a sign of pre-diabetes and cardiovascular disease. If you choose the passive mode of transport and abstain from exercise, then your risk of chronic disease is likely to increase markedly.”

“Increasing daily stepping could actually reverse a cause of chronic disease,” Booth adds. “When extra fats and sugars (glucose) don’t clear the bloodstream, they go where we don’t want them and cause problems for our bodies’ typical metabolic functions.”

The researchers also found that the total skeletal and muscle mass in the body decreased when activity decreased. Booth says that longer studies are needed to help answer more questions about the detrimental effects of long-term physical inactivity.

Focus on Stairs

Researchers in Switzerland have found that simply switching from taking the elevator at work to taking the stairs may have a dramatic impact on cardiovascular health. This research was presented at a meeting of the European Society of Cardiology.

The investigation followed 69 sedentary employees of the University Hospital in Geneva. For 12 weeks, the subjects used the stairs, rather than the elevator, at work.



Their average use of stairs climbed to 23 stories a day, compared with five stories prior to the study. This equates to a substantial gain in cardiovascular fitness and a 15 percent drop in the risk of dying.

Signs Up for Steps

Simply hanging up signs at your workplace or apartment building encouraging stair use can be extremely motivational. In one study, signage suggesting stair use over elevator use increased stair use at one college campus by 18.6 percent (*J Am Coll Health* 2008;57:242-4).

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