Current Health

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by Betsy Dru Tecco

Here's how walking can help you

hen it comes to fitness, taking walks is a great way to exercise. The health benefits really stack up if you follow a regular walking program. Amanda Mandel, a New York City freshman in high school, discovered some of the perks

when she started walking at age 13. "I lost weight," says Amanda, who is now 30 pounds lighter. "I feel more fit, I am more confident about myself, and have strong calf muscles. I can play sports better now too."

Amanda walks about two miles, four times a week, around her neighborhood. She also speed walks every few blocks. Hikes, however, have become her favorite way to walk. "I love the challenge of climbing [hills] and doing hiking trails," she says. "I like it best when it gets challenging, and then I feel good when I finish."

Pace Yourse

Before you start your own walking program, consider the answer to these questions:

- 1. What is my goal? If your
- 2. How much time can I spare? Aim to walk for 30
- 3. Will I walk alone? encourage you to stick to the

- 4. Where will I walk?
 - loose gravel, etc.). Indoor
- 5. How will I walk? Start out

Walk Off Stress!

The feel-good aspect of walking is one of its biggest pluses. Research shows that walking can help improve people's moods. A recent study released by the American College of Sports Medicine reported that brisk walking reduces feelings of tension and anxiety, whether you take one 30-minute walk or three 10minute walks a day. "It helps clear my head from school," notes Amanda. "After I walk, I really wake up and I'm able to focus on my homework."

Walking gives us positive energy, says Debbie Eisenstadt Mandel, Amanda's mother and author of Turn On Your Inner Light: Fitness for Body, Mind and Soul. "When we exercise," says Mandel, "we boost our energy levels and clarify our thinking by bringing oxygen

to the brain."



intense as jogging or running, it can improve aerobic, or cardiovascular, fitness. The key is to maintain a steady brisk pace, about 15 minutes per mile. You must walk fast enough to keep your heart rate in your target zone, but not so fast that you cannot carry on a conversation. To learn how to figure out your target-zone range, see "In the Target Zone" on this page.

You should check your pulse while you walk to make sure your heart rate stays within your target-zone range.

Walk to Avoid Disease

Walking increases your cardiovascular endurance as well as

in preventing problems such as heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure. "The faster and harder you walk, the greater the benefit for your heart," says Andrew Flach, co-author of Walk the Weight Away!

A walking program can help protect your bones from osteoporosis, a disease that causes a loss in bone density. Walking helps make bones stronger because it forces them to support your body's weight, Flach explains.

Walk to Lose Weight

An average-size person burns approximately 90 to 100 calories for every mile walked. Says

Flach: "Walking improves muscle tone, especially around the buttocks and hips." Best of all, it's great for weight loss, because you can do it for free, anytime, anywhere, with

"As my mother says, just put on your sneakers and walk out the door," says Amanda. "Start off slowly and every week go a little farther and faster. Eventually, you will be surprised by how much you have accomplished. That worked

anyone."

for me." ch2

per minute.