

Walking
one of the
best forms
of exercise

One of the best forms of physical exercise ever invented is right under our noses. Actually, closer to the ground, to be more specific. It's walking. Walking can be done anywhere, anytime, by almost anyone and it cost nothing, except the effort to get from here to there.

Walking is the most popular form of exercise in Ontario, and not because we have to do it. A 1986 study conducted by the Sports and Fitness Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation indicates over one-quarter of Ontario's 6.5 million adult population engage in walking as a physical fitness activity - roughly 1.7 million people.

Experts contend walking rejuvenates both body and spirit, firming muscles, loosening limbs and releasing physical and emotional tension.

But the benefits depend on the way we walk. According to Dr. Roy Sheppard, Director of the School of Physical and Health Education at the University of Toronto, many people walk in too leisurely a fashion to help their cardio-vascular systems.

As a fitness activity, the idea is to burn up as many calories as possible during your walk. Dr. Sheppard says, "But the leisurely walk takes too few calories to get from point A to point B."

What about the commonly-held

belief that if you jog, you'll get more exercise than if you walk? Not so, says Dr. Sheppard, an active walker himself. "I actually pass people who are jogging. They're expending less energy."

Besides, he adds, jogging puts triple the stress on the knees.

Most people, walk at a pace which increases the heart rate to only 100 to 110 beats per minute. For walking to be effective, "140 to 150 would be a reasonable rate for the average person," Dr. Sheppard says.

"But don't rush into things! advises Art Salmon, Manager of the Fitness Section of Sports and Fitness Ontario. "Start slowly. Don't expect to go out and walk five miles the first

day."

Before beginning a walking program, it's best to check with your family physician.

The workplace, where most of us spend most of our time, has great potential as an environment for walking fitness.

Even if you work in a confined office, you can engage in workday walking. It's a good idea to plan for it even before stepping out the front door of your home.

Walking can be a convenient five minutes or exercise every morning and evening. Over five business days, that's an extra 50 minutes of exercise per week. All one has to do is leave for work five minutes

earlier.

For example, walking a few extra blocks to the bus stop in the fresh morning air can get you prepared for the new day.

Statistics from Sports and Fitness Ontario indicate that women walk more than men. "Ten percent more women walk more than men," Mr. Salmon says. The same study showed 27 per cent of the province's adult female population walked as a form of physical fitness, compared to 17 per cent of the male population.

Choice of footwear is probably the single-most important factor in preparing for a walking program. "You don't need fancy running shoes," Dr. Sheppard says.

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