

WALKING FOR FUN AND FITNESS

Today is a great time to start a walking program! The benefits of walking are many: not only does it help to control weight, it also strengthens the heart and lungs, tones muscles, reduces stress, increases energy levels and enhances vitality. As an extra bonus, walking requires no special training or expensive equipment. It is one of the safest exercises, is convenient and is equally enjoyable whether you walk alone or with a group.

Starting a walking program is easy. Unfortunately, maintaining one usually proves to be more difficult. The following tips will ensure your walking program is a success, no matter what your goals are!

- **Frequency:** Walk a minimum of three times per week. Less than this will contribute little to cardiovascular fitness, weight loss or muscle tone.
- **Duration:** Walking, as with any other aerobic exercise, should be maintained for at least 20 minutes for any significant fitness benefit. If you are a novice, start with 20 minutes - the first 5 easy, and the next 15 at a slightly brisker pace. Gradually build up your endurance over several weeks, always beginning your walk with 5 - 10 minutes at an easy stroll. For variety and faster improvement, you may try alternating between a short, easy walk one day and a longer, brisker walk the next.
- **Intensity:** When starting a walking program, force yourself to keep both the duration and intensity of your walks low. As your fitness improves, slowly increase the intensity. If you are serious about fitness or losing weight, you may consider using a heart rate monitor. Keep your heart rate to about 70% of your maximum (220 minus your age) for a minimum of 15 consecutive minutes. You should be working hard enough to maintain a good perspiration! As you get more experience you may wish to alternate hard days, easy days.

The key to a successful walking program is ENJOYMENT. To keep your walking program fun:

1. Add variety. Find a new walk once a week. Never do the same route two days in a row.
2. When possible, get off the road and on to trails!
3. Walk with a friend! Exercise and socializing are not mutually exclusive! Good company makes long walks seem easy.

Dr. Sharon Wagener DeWolf is the owner of Redmond Back & Neck Pain Clinic. For more information, contact (425)885-9950.