

## Script – Print - Walk This Way

### Many Health Benefits to Starting a Walking Program

As Americans continue to cope with COVID-19, which has led to uncertainty surrounding the availability and use of fitness centers, exercise enthusiasts may be in search of a routine that won't compromise safety or break the bank.

That's where a walking program can help. A [study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine](#) found that people who participate in a walking program showed substantial improvements in blood pressure, slowing of resting heart rate, decrease of body fat and body weight, lower cholesterol, better quality of life and greater endurance, among other benefits.

"Walking is one of the easiest ways to get in physical activity," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. "It's always accessible, it's always free and it's going to improve your cardiovascular health, your mental health and your overall well-being."

While walking may not be a better cardio workout than running, it may be the best choice for some people. Walking helps with increased flexibility, increased muscular strength, and reduces the risk of diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. And you don't have to be a world-class athlete to reap the benefits of incorporating a program into your daily routine.

"Anybody with the ability to walk can do so," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. "It doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter how out of shape you are, there is nothing holding you back from creating a walking program. If you do have physical limitations you can always contact your doctor to get a referral or recommendation for what would work best for you to still get that cardiovascular benefit from exercise."

The best part about walking is it can be done anywhere. Now is the perfect time to find a favorite walking path, a city park or a neighborhood path. When the weather starts to turn, head inside to a shopping mall or invest in a treadmill that you can adjust the level of inclines, walking styles, and speed, all of which will help with caloric burn and target a specific muscle group.

"There's tons of beautiful parks in the area," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. "Always switching it up to a different location can help keep you from getting bored with your program, and it can also add new challenges because every different setting is a different terrain."

Hickok offers other tips that will help beginning walkers. Find a walking buddy who will help with accountability. Purchase a good pair of comfortable, properly fitting shoes, the best financial investment you'll have to make for your walking program. Remember to start any walk with a quick stretching routine or jog in place, and stretch after your walk to reduce soreness.

Start your program slowly to avoid burnout, and keep track of your progress with a walking app or a journal.

“Everyone is recommended to do 150 minutes of physical activity a week,” said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. “That comes out to about 22 minutes per day. If you are just beginning to exercise and are out of shape you can start at 5 minutes a day to 10 minutes every other day. It’s whatever works best for you and that will keep you continuing with the program.”

You should always check with a physician before starting any exercise program, especially if it’s something new for you. Learn more [here](#).