

Monthly Wellness Update

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Walking and Health

The decline of activity-and its effects

Everybody knows that simple exercise is an effective weapon in the fight against weight gain and obesity. And almost everybody knows that one of the easiest ways to get exercise is by taking a walk.

But for Americans, a recent article in *Time* magazine reveals, walking has become an increasingly rare practice. The article explains why. It also includes statistics that highlight how very important walking can be as a contributor not only to our physical fitness and fight against fat, but to our overall health.

The June 7 *Time* story begins by explaining that walking began to diminish following the growth of suburbs during the second half of the 20th century. Cities shrank in population and construction spread out over the countryside. The automobile became the only way to get around. It replaced urban forms of transportation: the streetcar, the city bus-and travel by putting one foot in front of the other.

That includes not only walking directly from Point A to Point B. Moving within a city by bus or subway also required some walking at either end of the trip. But when Americans acquired cars, suddenly every destination was no farther away on foot than the closest parking lot.

Obesity and hypertension

This change has had an impact on more than just our traveling habits. The *Time* article cites research on how loss of walking as a form of transportation has affected our health. One study compared the results of physical exams on residents of suburban versus urban areas. Test subjects who live in downtown Manhattan- in spite of its reputation as a high-stress environment-actually registered lower blood pressure levels than those who live in a Midwestern suburb. The latter were 29% more likely to have high blood pressure (hypertension). One difference? Manhattanites still use walking as a daily means of travel.

Another study investigated the lifestyle habits of Atlanta residents. It revealed a startling relationship between time spent driving in a car and walking activity. The research found that in a daily routine, every hour in a car adds an additional 6% to the chance of becoming obese. And the reverse is also true: every kilometer walked per day decreases the chance of obesity by 5%.

The trend continues

This mindset against walking is being passed along to the young. The *Time* article reports that the overwhelming majority of American children live within one mile of their school. Yet today only 17% of our kids get there on foot. Most are transported by bus or driven by their parents.

The reason, clearly, can't be to save time. At a normal pace, a person can walk a mile in about 15 to 20 minutes. Waiting for pickup at the bus stop, or battling traffic in a car, is not going to reduce the time spent commuting by any significant amount.

The disappearance of the simple and accessible form of exercise seems destined to continue into the next generation.

What to do about it?

What can we do about the decrease in walking-the loss of one of the most effective means of keeping fit and healthy? One answer is to find ways to incorporate a walk into our daily lives.

Another helpful approach is to find a means of making every step count. If we can't walk everywhere the way we used to, at least when we step out we can increase the amount of exercise we get with every pace.

One way to accomplish this is with Nikken CardioStrides. Their ergonomically weighted design helps transform daily activity into a cardiovascular workout. Even a short, 30-minute walk-or just wearing CardioStrides when running typical errands or doing housework-can produce additional benefits in terms of exercise. CardioStrides can be a way to help bring walking back into our lives.

*To obtain more information please contact
Advanced Rehabilitation Clinics, Inc. main office at 630-832-6919.*