

Walking For Leisurely Living

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When you walk for exercise, is it simply because you're at a loss for what to do to exercise? When you walk for exercise, is it more of a death march? Is it something you really don't want to do, but as a last resort, you make the effort?

The reluctant walker walks with her head down, her shoulders rounded forward and, in general, has a relaxed low back. The reluctant walker generally walks slowly and without purpose.



Plan to improve your walking experience.

Aimless walking in poor posture is not the best exercise. If you think you're a reluctant walker, there are a few things that you can do that will not only improve your exercise experience, but will improve the calories burned, improve muscle tone, and improve core strength. In addition, it will help you to release the endorphins that an excellent workout provides.

Before you begin your walk, think of these few things. First, are you limber?

If you've been sitting at a desk all day, or otherwise been sedentary, you need to think about warming up. Warming up doesn't necessarily mean sweating. Simple stretching exercises to warm up your upper body, lower body and your core are the best start for an energy efficient and effective walking workout.

Take 10 minutes to stretch out from foot to leg to hip with gentle weight-bearing stretches. If done with correct posture, these stretches will also warm up and tighten your core.

Low intensity weight-bearing stretches, such as lunging from a standing position, can do a great deal to warm up the lower extremities and strengthen your thighs, a.k.a. quads (short for the quadriceps tendon of your thigh).

Standing facing a wall with your arms outstretched at shoulder height puts you in position to do push-ups against the wall. These standing push-ups, if done with correct posture, will strengthen the upper muscle girdle as well as strengthen your core.

While doing any stretching exercises, it's important to remember to hold your abdomen and gluteal muscles tight. If you remember to do this, you not only

strengthen your core but you also strengthen those muscles around your hips that can add to stability and balance. This also improves your lower back support.

Most of us are creatures of habit, and so we choose the same warm up exercises from day to day. I am the worst offender for that. Conventional wisdom tells us that changing the exercises that you do from day to day improves how your muscles respond to nerve input.

Your body will derive a better health benefit if you vary your workout. If you do the same exercises repeatedly your body develops a memory for them. In fact, it's easy to create postures that make these repeated exercises even easier without knowing it.

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Walk With Purpose

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Drifting into poor posture is counterproductive to energy expenditure and energy efficiency in motion. Poor posture is also the major contributor to sprains, strains, weakness and even falling.

So think about the stretches that you want to use as your warm-up exercises. Switch them up from day to day.

If you feel you don't have enough time to do a full workout on any given day, simply take the time to do your warm-up stretches. That 10 minutes will get your body warmed up and will set off just enough endorphins. This will give you the incentive and the motivation that you need to conjure up the energy for a short workout.

Remember, a short workout is better than no workout. In fact, short workouts lead to longer workouts, given the production of positive chemistry and positive neural feedback from your brain.

Your brain learns from your body. The more you feed your brain positive chemistry through good, vigorous workouts, the more your brain will drive your body to do more.

This is called a positive feedback cycle. Positive feedback is like winning the lottery. You put in positive energy and determination; and your body puts out positive chemistry that makes you feel good and look good. Ultimately, it will give you good numbers on both the scale and the tape measure.

Imagine, all this is just from warm up exercises using good posture! And this is just the beginning.

Once you finish your warm-up stretching exercises, you're ready to take advantage of your well-energized large muscle groups and core. Using good posture and improved strength you'll protect your God-given joints from injury and instability.

Now you're ready to begin your walk.

Dr. Judge treats chronic pain and complex foot and ankle deformity. A focus on conservative treatment is always first. When surgery is needed this is her specialty. She can be reached in her Port Clinton office at 419.732.2618.