

WALKING & THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

WORLD'S
TALLEST
chiropractor
By: Dr. Stein

WE ALL KNOW THAT WALKING IS GOOD FOR US, ESPECIALLY AFTER WE ADDED A FEW EXTRA POUNDS OF BODYWEIGHT TO OUR FRAMES AFTER THE HOLIDAYS. BUT DID YOU KNOW IT HELPS THE LYMPHATIC SYSTEM AS WELL?

Let's take a look at the lymphatic system and what it does in our bodies. It mainly serves three purposes in the body: (1) It is a major defender against disease. (2) It drains fluid from body tissues back into the bloodstream. (3) It filters lymph (that's a clear watery fluid that surrounds body tissues).

So, here we have a system in our bodies that has the potential to defend us against all kinds of disease causing agents – but it has one drawback. The lymphatic system doesn't have a built in pump, it only works when we move around. It's not like the arterial system that's being pumped by the heart and the arteries themselves. The lymphatic system consists of one-way valves that only transport lymph if we move around. My personal favorite is walking. You can do it almost anywhere, it hardly needs any preparation, it's ideal to do during breaks at work and it effectively builds the muscles in the lower back.

Technique: Make sure to keep your head up and eyes fixed on the horizon. Keep your arms and shoulders relaxed and your spine straight. If you suck in your belly while walking you are actually toning your abdominal muscles at the same time. Your stride should be long but not too long. You still have to be able to control your body movement. The last thing is to breathe deeply, but comfortably.

In order to decrease the risk of injury, do some gentle stretching before and after your walking exercise. This will also increase your flexibility and reduce muscle aches.

In general follow this simple rule: pay attention to your body. If any exercise increases your symptoms, stop and change your approach.

Benefits: Since walking is an exercise that's considered low impact, it is easy on the joints. Many studies have found that walking can reduce your risk of osteoporosis, stroke, high blood pressure, depression and diabetes. Now you can add the benefit of a functioning lymphatic system to it. Patients report

that they sleep better at night, feel better and have an overall more positive outlook on life.

Since your only necessary equipment is a decent pair of shoes (it seems that older folks do better with harder soles, since they often have a hard time feeling the ground with their feet), walking is one of the most cost-effective ways to exercise.

One more benefit is the social aspect of walking. It is a great way of talking to people while doing something for one's health. But here is the bad news: If it is very easy for you to hold a conversation with your fellow walker, you are going too slowly. Pick up the pace! But if it is impossible for you to talk – and all you do is huff and puff: slow down, you are going too fast.

Consistency: Keeping a walking log will help you attain your set goals. The purchase of a pedometer adds another twist to the exercise: 10,000 steps per day is the minimum. They are small enough to wear anytime and might motivate you to break your old "record" from the day before.

There is a lot of controversy on how long one should exercise every day. Most experts say 30 minutes per day. In a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA March 21, 2001; 285: 1447-1454) women who walk for as little as one hour per week, can cut their risk of heart disease in half. The benefits kept increasing, when these women walked for one to one and a half hours per week. Their heart disease risk was cut down to 51%, compared to women who didn't exercise.

In my own opinion, walking is great. But if you don't enjoy it, find something that you like. And stick with it: the benefits won't come overnight, but it will be worth the effort. Your spine and your lymphatic system will thank you for it!

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