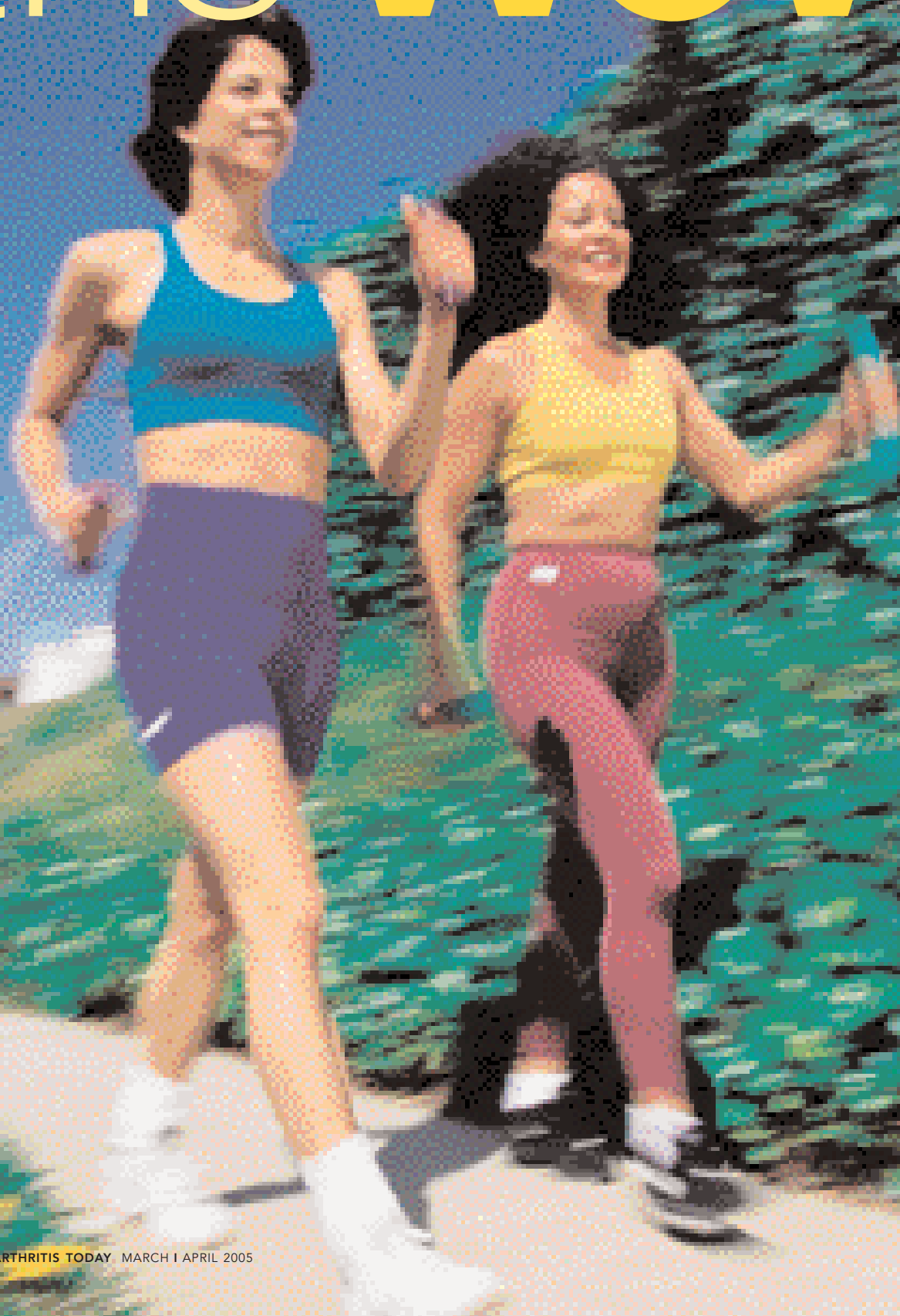


the **wow**



of walking

Step
after
step,
walking
scores
big as a
fantastic
way to
improve
your
life all
around.

By **Karen J. Bannan**
and **Lissa Poirot**

IN THE '70S AND '80S, IT SEEMED LIKE EVERYONE HAD TAKEN UP JOGGING. People of all ages donned athletic suits and pounded the pavement. Shoe manufacturers developed jogging shoes touting the best performance for runners. And while jogging proved to be a good exercise for weight loss and remains popular, the intense passion for jogging and years of all that pavement pounding did quite a number on knees.

Today, people are hitting the streets once again in droves, this time suited in casual wear and comfortable shoes. They are taking it easy on the joints and knees, maintaining or lowering their weight if they do it just 30 minutes a day, lifting spirits, and getting a sense of accomplishment, and a breath of fresh air. Best of all, "it" is free! What's this popular miracle worker? Walking!

How Far We've Come

As literary fans of Laura Ingalls Wilder, Shakespeare or the Bible can tell you, farmers, merchants and everyday folks used to walk everywhere. While horses and carts were a part of life, so was walking – be it a trip to a neighbor's house or to town to pick up the mail, it wasn't unusual for a trip to last several days. Armies during the Crusades walked on what must have been strong legs across Europe. Lewis and Clark walked across the country plotting maps of the New World while simultaneously building up their hamstrings and quadriceps. Pioneers typically walked beside their wagon trains – wagons loaded to the brim with life necessities – which provided the conditioning they would later need to survive in the fields, gold mines and frontier.

"Walking has been one of the things that knits people together in parades, protests, demonstrations and pilgrimages. It's what gives people a sense of community," says Rebecca Solnit, an adjunct professor of social sciences at University of California at Berkeley.

However, as automobiles were introduced at the turn of the century and eventually became commonplace, walking became less about necessity and more about the physical benefits of the journey. People began to see the benefits of walking as exercise, taking "constitutionals," or walks for one's health. Still, during this time, constitutionals were mostly taken by the upper class, who didn't have to work. Walking, however, is a tradition that waned as suburban spread stretched deeper into the heartland beginning in the '50s and '60s.

But the benefits of all that walking as a way of life are made glaringly evident by groups of people who still live the old, active life, like the Amish. When you think of the Amish, you probably think of simple folk who live life with few of the conveniences that we have. And under those old-fashioned outfits lie fit, healthy bodies. The reason: Living in agricultural villages, they eschew the fancy cars, trains and planes we use to get around and rely on their own two feet for propulsion. A study published in 2004 found that the average Amish man walks 18,000 steps daily. His female counterpart walks 14,000 steps every day. Compare those numbers to what the average American woman clocks – about 5,400 steps each day – and you can see why only four percent of Amish men and 24 percent of Amish women are obese

or overweight. Unfortunately, when it comes to numbers, they've got us beat. Our tallies: 31 percent of us are obese and 65 percent of us are overweight.

"The Amish were able to show us just how far we've fallen in the last 150 years or so in terms of the amount of physical activity we typically perform," says David R. Bassett Jr., PhD, fitness and exercise professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Today, unless you live in a major, pedestrian city such as New York, walking to work, the store or to a friend's house is difficult to accomplish in our world of sprawl. A recent Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J., study found that not only are people taking short trips by car rather than walking, but also that walking in our cities is much more dangerous for pedestrians than in other parts of the world. While the convenience store may be a half mile down the road, a lack of sidewalks and heavy traffic may require you to drive instead of walk.

Keep on Target

The American Heart Association recommends monitoring your heart rate when participating in any fitness program – even one as simple as walking – to make sure you aren't overdoing it. Some tips to keep you on target:

- Check your pulse periodically to make sure you are within your target heart rate, which is 50 to 75 percent of your maximum heart rate. (Your maximum beats per minute can be found by subtracting your age from 220.)
- Stay within your target heart rate to provide the best benefits of exercise to your body. When you start a program, aim for 50 percent. If you have been walking for some time, try to reach 75 percent. If your pulse is below your target heart rate, try increasing your pace to be sure you are working at your optimal level, and vice versa if your pulse is too high.
- Not sure you're within your target range? Here's a way to cheat: Carry on a conversation. If you can talk without exertion while you walk, you're within your target heart rate. If not, slow your pace.

Safety concerns have also led more of us to drive our children to school or to the school bus stop.

Although walking for daily life's necessities has fallen to the wayside, that doesn't mean no one walks anymore. Despite our reliance on planes, trains and automobiles, there are plenty of people walking for health necessity, as well as pleasure. In fact, walking is more popular than swimming with people 50 and older, according to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. The Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association in West Palm Beach, Fla., reports there were 37.9 million fitness walkers in 2003, up from 36.2 million in 2000 – 62 percent are female.

A Mile a Day

What's not to like about walking? It's free, it's easy to do and it's easy on the joints. There are few restrictions when it comes to walking, and there's nothing intimidating about doing it – most

everyone can do it, no matter the pace. And there's no question that walking is good for you. Walking is an aerobic exercise; a University of Tennessee study found that women who walked had less body fat than those who didn't walk. It also lowers the risk of blood clots, since the calf acts as a venous pump, contracting and pumping blood from the feet and legs back to the heart, reducing the load on the heart. Walking is good for you in a number of other ways, including:

Walking improves circulation. It also wards off heart disease, brings up heart rate, lowers blood pressure and strengthens the heart. A University of Colorado at Boulder and University of Tennessee study found that postmenopausal women who walked just one to two miles a day lowered blood pressure by nearly 11 points in 24 weeks. Women who walked 30 minutes a day reduced their risk of stroke by 20 percent – by 40 percent when they stepped up the pace, according to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston.

Walking lowers risk of fractures. A Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, study of postmenopausal women found that 30 minutes of walking each day reduced their risk of hip fractures by 40 percent.

Walking as exercise can lead to a longer life. Recent research out of the University of Michigan Medical School and the Veterans Administration Ann Arbor Healthcare System says those who exercise regularly in their 50s and 60s are 35 percent less likely to die over the next eight years than their non-walking counterparts. That number shoots up to 45 percent less likely for those who have underlying health conditions.

Walking supports joints. It tones muscles that in turn support the joints, especially the leg and abdominal muscles – and even arm muscles if you pump them as you walk. Walking can also stop the loss of bone mass for those

with osteoporosis, according to Michael A. Schwartz, MD, Plancher Orthopedics & Sports Medicine in New York. "One of the well-known orthopaedic phrases is 'Life is lotion and lotion is life.' Walking starts that 'lotion' moving through the joints," explains Dr. Schwartz.

The reason: The majority of joint cartilage has no direct blood supply. It gets its nutrition from synovial or joint fluid that circulates as we move. Impact that comes from movement or compression, such as walking, "squishes" the cartilage, bringing oxygen and nutrients into the area. If you don't walk, joints are deprived of life-giving fluid, which can speed deterioration. In addition, muscles surrounding the fragile joints atrophy, additionally stressing them, making them unstable and prone to injury. But walking increases the strength and flexibility of your muscles, increasing range of motion and shifting the pressure and your weight from joints to muscles – which are meant to handle weight – helping to lessen arthritis pain. Extra body weight also adds pressure to joints. With

walking, you're not only strengthening the muscles to better carry additional weight, you're trimming away unwanted pounds and eliminating pressure – a two-for-one benefit.

Janet Curtiss, director of a Jenny Craig weight-loss center in Pembroke Pines, Fla., says she's seen the benefits of a walking program first hand. Curtiss, 51, was diagnosed with fibromyalgia 10 years ago and psoriatic arthritis seven years later. At the time, she was 110 pounds overweight and could barely

move. The arthritis in her feet was so painful, she says there were days she swore they weighed 500 pounds. "My hands and feet always hurt, and there were days when I felt like I could barely get out of bed," she says. Her joints were deteriorating. Not wanting to become completely disabled, Curtiss started a walking program. It was a slow start, but within one year she lost 100 pounds and regained much of her mobility, she says. Today, she walks five miles almost daily. She even walks

The Habit-Forming Plan

It takes 12 weeks for an exercise routine to become a habit. We've developed a plan for all fitness levels. If you've never walked for exercise, follow our beginner plan. If you walk occasionally, follow the intermediate plan. If you walk often or used to walk for exercise, you can follow the advanced plan. It's always best to get an OK from your doctor before starting any plan.

	BEGINNERS			INTERMEDIATE			ADVANCED		
* = add an INCLINE	TIME	SPEED	FREQUENCY	TIME	SPEED	FREQUENCY	TIME	SPEED	FREQUENCY
WEEK 1	5 minutes	1 mph	3 days	10 minutes	1.5 mph	3 days	15 minutes	2 mph	3 days
WEEK 2	7 minutes	1.5 mph	3 days	15 minutes	1.5 mph	3 days	15 minutes	2 mph	4 days
WEEK 3	10 minutes	1.5 mph	3 days	15 minutes	2 mph	3 days	20 minutes	2 mph	4 days*
WEEK 4	10 minutes	1.5 mph	4 days	15 minutes	2 mph	4 days	20 minutes	2 mph	5 days*
WEEK 5	15 minutes	1.5 mph	4 days	15 minutes	2 mph	4 days*	15 minutes	2 mph	5 days*
WEEK 6	15 minutes	1.5 mph	5 days	15 minutes	2.5 – 3 mph	4 days*	30 minutes	3 mph	5 days*
WEEK 7	20 minutes	1.5 mph	5 days	25 minutes	2.5 – 3 mph	5 days*	35 minutes	3 mph	5 days*
WEEK 8	25 minutes	1.5 mph	5 days	30 minutes	3 mph	5 days*	40 minutes	3 mph	5 days*
WEEK 9	25 minutes	1.5 mph	5 days	35 minutes	3 mph	5 days*	45 minutes	3.5 mph	5 days*
WEEK 10	30 minutes	1.5 mph	5 days	40 minutes	3 mph	5 days*	50 minutes	3.5 mph	5 days*
WEEK 11	30 minutes	1.5 mph	5 days	45 minutes	3 mph	5 days*	60 minutes	3.5 mph	5 days*
WEEK 12	35 minutes	1.5 mph	5 days*	45 minutes	3 mph	6 days*	60 minutes	4 mph	5 days*

Make Walking That Mile Easier

Walking is one of the easiest ways to keep in shape, but if your feet aren't comfortable, you may experience lower back or joint pain. To keep your feet on the pavement, consider these various shoe inserts to help ease pain associated with plantar fasciitis, and heel, hip and lower back pain.

Cushioned Anti-Pronation Inserts (CAPI): Developed by a podiatrist, these inserts provide a deep heel cup, extended lateral flange and an integrated arch support system. The inserts are available in various thicknesses for extra shock absorption. (\$35, 800/643-5536 or www.shoeinserts.com)

Dr. Scholl's Tri-Comfort Orthotics: Provides arch support and ball and heel cushions to help relieve heel, arch, ball and lower back pain. (\$8.89 at most drugstores, or visit www.drugstore.com)

SofSole Performance Graphite Orthotic: These medical-grade orthotic insoles feature a gel heel, deep heel cup and a comfortable arch perfect for flat feet. (\$41.95 online and at retail outlets; visit www.sofsole.com for stores)

Sorbothane's SorboGel Insole: These gel insoles feature an orthotic graphite arch support system and heel cushioning and protection. (\$19.95, 877/797-6726 or www.rxsorbo.com)

Spenco PolySorb Inserts: Walker insoles have a cushioned heel for shock absorption, or try cross trainer, everyday or hiker insoles, depending on your walks. (\$24.99 at www.thesportsauthority.com)

in her pool, too, moving her legs against the natural resistance of the water.

"I feel if I wasn't walking I would be in unbearable pain. I might be on the next level – not being able to move at all," she says. "Plus, being outside and breathing the fresh air lifts my spirits and helps me manage stress."

Walk Along Memory Lane

So, lowered blood pressure, less joint pressure, a decreased risk of stroke and an opportunity to keep excess weight at bay not enough to get you walking? How about a better night's sleep, decreased stress, a better memory and less depression?

While walking boasts a number of physical benefits, it also can give the brain mental boosts as well. Some examples:

Walking slows mental decline. A study of 6,000 women, ages 65 and older, performed by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, found that age-related memory decline was lower in those who walked more. The women walking 2.5 miles per day had a 17-percent decline in memory, as opposed to a 25-percent decline in women who walked less than a half-mile per week.

Walking lowers Alzheimer's risk. A study from the University of Virginia Health System in Charlottesville found that men between the ages of 71 and 93 who walked more than a quarter of a mile per day had half the incidence of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, compared to those who walked less.

Walking improves sleep. A study from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle found that women, ages 50 to 75, who took one-hour morning walks were more likely to

relieve insomnia than women who didn't walk. **Walking lightens mood.** Research reported in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* found that walking 30 minutes a day boosted the moods in depressed patients faster than antidepressants. Why? Walking releases natural painkilling endorphins to the body. A California State University, Long Beach, study showed that the more steps people took during the day, the better their moods were.

Besides these feel-good reasons for walking, it also serves as a form of meditation. An outdoor stroll can help erase a bad day as you instead start to focus on the surrounding environment. Carolyn S. Kortge began walking in the '80s and entered her first race-walking competition in the '90s, eventually becoming a USA Track and Field Association bronze and silver race-walking medalist. Carolyn, who lives in Eugene, Ore., was diagnosed with osteoarthritis (OA) in 2004, but continues to keep her mind off the pain in her knees and hands by walking daily.

"When you're walking there's an opportunity for meditative intent. You can be silent and focus on creating a connection with your body through prayer, breathing or a phrase," she says. "It's a wonderful way of changing your focus."

Setting out on the Path

Ready to get the benefits of walking yourself? Starting a walking program isn't that difficult, but there are several steps that anyone should follow before hitting the road for the first time. First, check in with a doctor or physical therapist who can assess your levels of strength, flexibility and pain. For example, a physical therapist will discuss your arthritis, evaluate your ability and then tailor a walking program that includes pain control, explains Beth Domholdt, a physical therapist and professor at the Krannert School of Physical Therapy at the University of Indianapolis.

To minimize pain when walking, Shirley Archer, a health educator at Stanford University, Palo Alto, Calif., emphasizes good posture: the ears, shoulders, hips and knees should be in alignment and you should use your eyes – not your neck and head – to look downward. (See "Do It Right," page 59.)


Once you begin a program, don't be surprised if you ache a little at the beginning of every stroll, says Domholdt, but it should dissipate. "There's always going to be a certain amount of discomfort, but you should not be walking with pain," she says. "The big guideline is the two-hour rule – if there is pain or inflammation that bothers you for more than two hours after the training session ends that means you worked out too hard. Start gradually and progress slowly."

Not convinced that walking is a breeze? The Centers for

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 94]

Do It Right

Make strides toward better health by walking well.



Block the rays. Wear UVA- and UVB-blocking sunglasses to protect eyes, and apply sunscreen on your face and exposed body parts about 15 minutes before heading outside. Consider wearing a hat, too.

Stop chicken wings. Bend elbows at a 90-degree angle, keep hands loose and arms close to your body. As left foot moves forward, right arm moves backward. Bring arm forward no higher than your chest.

Watch your posture. Stand up straight – don't lean forward or arch your back. Keep eyes focused ahead, watching for objects that may cause you to trip, not watching your shoes. Keeping your chin parallel with the ground helps reduce neck and upper back strain. Let shoulders relax, hold in abdomen and tuck your tailbone under by rotating hips forward a bit and tightening buttocks. Keeping your core muscles strong reduces lower back strain.

Stretch your hamstrings. After a walk – and several times throughout each day – stretch your hamstrings; tight hamstrings can make walking difficult and painful. Try this stretch: Sit with left leg straight and left toes flexed toward your shin. Place your right foot against inner left thigh. With back straight, slowly bend forward at hips toward your left toes.

Keep it compact. Your walking stride should result in many smaller steps rather than a few long ones. Reaching too far forward with the front foot doesn't increase your power; in fact, it can be hard on your back and hips. Increasing the number of steps you take per second is a better measure of your walking strength.

Put your best foot forward. Choose good, flexible shoes that allow your foot to roll through each step from heel to toe, yet keep your foot from overpronating – putting more pressure on the outer edge of your foot, and therefore more stress on your knees and hips.

– DONNA RAE SIEGFRIED

Disease Control and Prevention reports that you can still see benefits by incorporating 30 minutes worth of walking, about 3,300 steps, into your day. Try small bursts of walking that can be just as beneficial as a longer workout.

“If your goal is simply to improve your health, research substantiates as little as 30 minutes a day is sufficient activity to get health improvement, and that time can be split into three 10-minute bouts,” says Archer.

Once you get started, the results are impressive. Researchers at Columbia University, New York, assessed the impact of an arthritis-walking program. The patients who walked during the eight-week study had a 70-meter increase in the distance they could walk in six minutes – three-quarters of the length of a football field. More importantly, test subjects reported a 27-percent decrease in pain and a drop in medication use.

“Personally, we didn’t think that the study would be more than a nice doctoral dissertation. In the end, we were surprised at how widespread and impressive the impact was,” says lead researcher John Allegrante, PhD, professor of health education at Columbia University’s Teachers College and adjunct professor, public health in sociomedical sciences. “People improved and felt better doing it.”

Sandy Lamb, a writer from Denver, began her walking program to keep herself limber and in shape after OA made it impossible to do other exercises without hurting. She learned first hand the “wow” of walking. “Sometimes, when you’re not feeling at the top of the game it’s hard to go out and push yourself to walk,” she says. “That’s when I use tapes or another incentive to get myself going. By the end of my three-and-a-half mile walk, I feel the pain subsiding.”

*Karen Bannan is a frequent contributor to Arthritis Today magazine.
Lissa Poirot is Arthritis Today’s managing editor.*

Choosing a Pedometer

“I’m not seeing any results.” It’s one of the most common reasons people quit an exercise program. While you may not notice immediate results, with each step you take, you are making yourself healthier from the inside out.

“We hear it all the time, and we explain that results won’t be overnight,” explains Michael A. Schwartz, MD, of Plancher Orthopedics & Sports Medicine in New York. “It does take time before you see some of the benefits.”

Thankfully, this excuse is one of the easiest to get over, at least for walkers. Doctors and exercise physiologists say wearing a pedometer can help people stay on track. The reason: Pedometers count steps. They are typically worn on a belt or waistband and record steps every time your hip moves up and down. You can use a pedometer as a visual record of your walking program’s goals, and have a historical view of where you started and how far you go – literally – every day.

Choosing a pedometer is fairly easy, according to Patrick Schneider, an exercise physiologist and assistant professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Schneider recently studied 10 popular pedometers and discovered these five models very accurate due to the internal mechanisms and sensitivity to a person’s steps:

Yamax Digi-Walker SW-200 and SW-701 (\$21.95, \$29.95, respectively), 888/748-5377, www.digiwalker.com

New-Lifestyles NL-2000 (\$54.95), 888/748-5377, www.new-lifestyles.com

SportLine Electronic Pedometer 330 and 345 (\$12.95, \$29.95, respectively), 914/964-5200, www.sportline.com

WIN One 100 LUCKY READERS will win one of these top-rated pedometers courtesy of Yamax, New-Lifestyles, Sportline and Arthritis Today. Be among the first 100 callers: 800/283-7800. Mention our pedometer giveaway and be sure to leave your name, home address, e-mail address, age and condition.

10,000 Steps

In an effort to promote healthy living, health officials are promoting the benefits of taking 10,000 steps a day – the equivalent of five miles. But 10,000 steps can seem like a lot. How can you get in those added steps? Follow our path for ways to sneak in extra steps each day.

Slave to e-mail? Avoid using e-mail at work. Walk over to your coworker to have a conversation.

Own a dog? Take Fido for an extra-long walk.

Driving somewhere? No matter your destination, park your car in a spot farthest from the door so you have to take extra steps to get inside.

Ride public transportation? Get off the bus or train a stop early and walk the rest of the way to you destination.



The Buddy System

Research proves it: Exercising with a buddy can help you stick with a walking program, but sometimes it isn't easy finding someone who can work with your schedule. Need to find a walking buddy? Here's how to make the first move.

The Web is a great resource. Sites such as www.allwalks.com, www.buddyup.com, www.exercisefriends.com and the American Volkssport Association (www.ava.org) connect people with similar interests and abilities – usually for free. Once signed up, members can set up walking dates, chat about progress and discuss walking-related topics such as buying shoes or dealing with shin splints.

Looking for a walking group? Check to see if your mall has a mall-walking program. These programs, which usually run year-round, provide the safety of a large group with the benefits of community.

"There are quite a few mall-walking programs. Many open their doors early so walkers can exercise without getting slowed

down by shoppers," explains Michael A. Schwartz, MD, of Plancher Orthopedics & Sports Medicine, in New York. "Mall walking gets you involved with a group, but it is also more user-friendly to walk indoors sometimes, especially when it's too hot or cold outside."

Finally, if you like the idea of commiserating with other walkers but don't want to commit to a face-to-face experience, you may want to try out www.sportbrain.com. For \$99 you get a branded pedometer that uploads your daily step totals along with calories burned and miles walked to the Web site so you can compare and share your progress with others on the service.

"People take walking groups very seriously and use them as motivational tools," says Lisa Hulme, SportsBrain's operations director. "It's a great way to meet new people and stay with a walking program."

On the phone? Pace. It's especially easy to walk around your home if on a cordless phone, or purchase an extra-long phone cord to take your phone with you as you circle the room. Do it at work, too.

Going up? Skip the elevator and take the stairs instead.

Buying groceries? Ignore the cart bins in the parking lot and return your cart to the store so you have to walk back and forth one extra time.

Walk The Walk

The Arthritis Foundation's annual Arthritis Walk is coming to a city near you this May. Call 877/232-2898, visit www.arthritis.com or contact your local chapter to learn how you can participate in the 3.1-mile walk and raise funds for arthritis awareness and research.

