



Pick Your Path to Health

Walking Can Change a Woman's Life

If you are like most women, you probably spend a good deal of your time caring for others. Children, spouses, parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbors all need your support and help from time to time. Working outside the home can further diminish your free time as you scramble to prepare meals, help kids with homework, manage health care for an aging parent, wash clothes, and generally keep the household running smoothly. As a result, you probably do not spend enough time taking care of yourself.

Healthy People 2010, the nation's agenda for health in the next decade, shows key health disparities between minority women and white women. For example, heart disease is the number one cause of death for women, however African American women are 25 percent more likely to die from heart disease than are white women.

There's one activity that you can start today to improve your health, and with so many people counting on you what could be more important? That activity is walking. Walking has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other chronic diseases, so consider it vitally important to your well being.

"Of all the modifiable risk factors, exercise is the most important in preventing cardiovascular disease," says Dr. B. Wayne Kong, CEO of the Association of Black Cardiologists.

Take It One Step At a Time

So, if you are not already exercising on a regular basis, you can begin by walking. At work, take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator. And if you live or work near the park, library, grocery store, or other frequent destinations, consider walking (rather than driving) to get to where you need to go.

Be sure to walk smart. If you haven't been active for awhile, first check with your doctor. Your doctor can help you determine a walking schedule that's right for you based on your age, weight, and current level of activity. Over time, you'll be able to walk farther and more quickly.

To keep walking a regular part of your routine, consider walking with a friend or a group of walkers. Other ways to establish a regular walking program include:

- Start a women's walking club at the local mall or shopping plaza.
- Walk your dog.
- Participate in a walk-a-thon. (Check your newspaper's community calendar and grocery store bulletin boards to learn about upcoming walk opportunities.)
- Use a treadmill at your local fitness center or home. This option is foolproof no matter what the weather is outside.

Most of all, keep your eyes on the prize: a long life so you can watch your grandchildren grow up.

"Children should know their grandparents and become great grandparents themselves," says Dr. Kong, "so let's get out there and walk."

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."