

Health

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Use a pedometer to measure exercise

We have all read about the epidemic of obesity and inactivity in this country. Data from the latest National Health Interview Survey indicates that only about one in three adults engage in regular exercise. This survey, which is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, states that 70 percent of Americans are not reaching the minimum recommended exercise amount of 30 minutes, five days a week. Worse yet, nearly half the population reports no activity at all. The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports estimates that physical inactivity contributes to 300,000 preventable deaths in the nation each year. Also, statistics indicate that inactive people are twice as likely to develop coronary heart disease and are at increased risk for obesity, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, increased cholesterol, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, anxiety and depression.

How can you determine how much activity you're getting each day? Use a pedometer, a tiny electronic device worn on a belt or waistband used to record the movement of the hip with each step. Over the course of a day, it counts the number of footsteps you have taken. Pedometers not only raise awareness of how much activity a person is getting, but they also appear to increase motivation to increase physical activity. Additionally, people who use a pedometer and set a "step goal" find that they have more energy, less stress and more weight loss than people who don't set "step goals".

The recommendation is to start using a pedometer when you wake up in the morning and leave it on until you go to bed. If you take only 5,000 steps in a day, you are considered fairly sedentary. Most middle-aged adults take 6,000-7,000 steps a day, an amount that is considered insufficient for wellness. For good health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends a goal of 10,000 steps each day. However, this may be too high for adults who are chronically ill, disabled or usually sedentary, and it is too low for most children.

To begin, get your doctor's OK if you're unaccustomed to exercise. Then, determine your baseline number of daily steps by wearing the pedometer for a few days. Third, pick a personal step goal that you think is right for you and which you can sustain. Fourth, gradually increase your activity beyond your baseline and remember to stay in touch with your doctor in case any health problems occur.

Here are some tips to help you increase your fitness level using a pedometer:

- Rake leaves or work in the garden.
- Talk a walking break instead of a coffee break.
- Get up from your chair frequently to stretch and move around.
- Take the stairs two or three flights instead of the elevator.
- Put on upbeat music while you clean your house.
- Park in the farthest space from the store, or a short distance away from your work.
- In the winter, find long halls or walk the malls. Take a friend along to chat.