

10,000 Steps a Day

Shape Up America! www.shapeup.org

Why 10,000 Steps?

In December 2001, Dr. David Satcher, the U.S. Surgeon General at that time, issued *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. In this report, Dr. Satcher joined former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop in highlighting the health risks and costs of overweight and obesity, and issued a call to Americans to take action. Dr. Koop founded Shape Up America! in 1994 because of his concern about the increasing prevalence of obesity in America. The mission of Shape Up America! is to provide science-based information and guidance on weight management. In 1996, the Surgeon General issued an important report on physical activity and warned us that we are just not active enough. Our focus here is on adults. We want to clarify how much exercise is necessary to manage your weight and help you reach 10,000 steps a day.

Exercise for Health—How Much is Enough?

The Surgeon General's report recommends that adults do about 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day IN ADDITION TO their customary daily activities. This is a health recommendation – it is backed by solid evidence that you WILL improve your health if you follow this recommendation. But studies show 30 minutes is not likely to be enough activity to prevent overweight in the first place or to prevent weight regain after losing weight.

Exercise for Weight Management—How Much is Enough?

First, know that there are two critical aspects of weight management – weight loss and prevention of weight gain (or weight regain). The key to weight loss is diet – eating less by controlling portion sizes and making appropriate food and beverage choices. The key to preventing weight gain (or regain) is exercise. For that purpose, some studies suggest that, for adults, walking 10,000 steps a day is about the right amount—and it takes more than 30 minutes to reach that goal.

Shape Up America! purchased pedometers to help us speak to you about the physical activity goal of 10,000 steps a day. We purchased a basic model that only tracks steps; so, it was the least expensive, costing less than \$25. We learned you can't just stick it in your pocket; you have to firmly clip it to a belt or waistband in order for it to work properly. After wearing the pedometer for a few weeks, we found that under normal circumstances – working and doing everyday activities – we walked anywhere from 900 to 3000 steps, or about 1/2 to 1 1/2 miles a day.

To put this in perspective, 2000 steps is about equal to walking one mile and burning about 100 calories. We found it was nearly impossible for us to get in 10,000 daily steps without intentionally going out for a walk (or getting on a treadmill). 10,000 steps may seem like a lot, but realize that it doesn't have to be done all at once. Ten minutes here, 20 minutes there, a few times a day, quickly add up. Are you ready to give it a try?

Tips to Help You Get Started

First, you will need a good pair of sneakers or walking shoes. We actually prefer a running shoe with plenty of cushion. The best shoe for you will give you proper support, cushioning and flexibility and will fit comfortably. A shoe-fitting expert can help you find the right shoe for your walking needs. Remember, when your walking shoes begin to wear out—our sneakers lasted about six months—it's time to replace them.

Start by wearing the pedometer each day for two weeks and don't do anything to change your normal routine. Log your steps each day before you go to bed. At the end of the second week, look at how many steps you took daily, in the course of living your life. For example, it may be as few as 700 steps on some days and as high as 2500 steps on other days.

If you feel comfortable doing so, take the highest number of steps you have walked on a given day and use that number as your daily step goal. To avoid injury, do not select a higher number. Aim for your chosen goal each day for the next two weeks. For example, if your first step goal is 2500 steps, try to walk that many steps for the next two weeks. Before bedtime each night, log in the number of steps you actually took.

At the end of the two weeks, review the number of steps you took each day and decide if you are ready to add another 500 steps to your goal. Using our example, your new step goal would be 3000 steps a day for the next two weeks.

Continue in that manner, working up as slowly as you wish, until you reach the goal of 10,000 steps a day. Check with your physician if you experience any pain or discomfort that concerns you. Pain is a warning signal that something may not be right. Our goal is to keep you active for the rest of your life. So don't go overboard and pull a muscle that will put you out of commission. Take it easy and take it slow.

I hate to Walk, But I Like To ...

If you really don't like to walk, but you like to jog or run, go ahead and step into activities you enjoy. A pedometer can track your steps whether your moving slow or fast. It works well for jogging or running. However, if you use special exercise equipment or like to bike, swim or kayak, a pedometer will not keep good track of your activity. We found that even on a stair climber in the gym, it was not accurate. But not to worry, if you know the approximate number of minutes it takes to reach your step goal, you can "translate" 10,000 steps into an equivalent time goal for your favorite activity. For example, swimming for 45 minutes would be roughly equivalent to walking for 45 minutes. Keep in mind that walking is considered a moderate intensity activity; if you do an activity that is more vigorous than walking (one that makes you sweat a lot and/or breathe heavily), it will take you less time to reach your goal.

To avoid injury, you need to work up slowly. If you have any concerns about your joints (ankles, knees or hips), discuss your exercise plans with your physician.

Staying the Course

I've Reached My Goal! How Do I Keep It Up?

Know that it takes about six months to “lock in” a new behavior. Be prepared to dedicate yourself to your goal each day. If you do this for at least six months, you are much more likely to maintain this goal permanently.

If you skip a few days due to illness, work or other obligations, get back in step as soon as possible. The more days you skip, the more likely you are to abandon your program. But if you start right back up, and can do it two days in a row, you'll find that the third day of exercise will be easier to achieve.

If you're starting to feel bored, try these suggestions:

Listen to the radio or a high-energy music CD, or step to the beat of an iPod or other handheld music player.

Find an exercise “buddy” to accompany you on a walk. Ask a friend or co-worker to join you at a regularly-scheduled time, such as during your lunch break. Or go for a family walk. But, be prepared to go by yourself, if necessary.

Keep an exercise log so you can monitor yourself and see how far you've come since you started. Be proud of your accomplishments!

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