

## Increase Your Daily Step Count

By Melissa Yates, Health Educator

As we enter the last week of March into May, you may be looking for ways to get extra steps in your day to finish the challenge on a high note. Even if you are not participating in the program, you might wonder why being active and increasing your daily step count is important. You have probably heard that walking improves your cardiac health, alleviates depression and fatigue, improves mood, creates less stress on joints and reduces pain, can prevent weight gain, reduce the risk for cancer and chronic disease, improve endurance, circulation, and posture, and the list goes on. In fact, Dr. Thomas Frieden, former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, stated that walking is "the closest thing we have to a wonder drug." [Harvard Health](#) has recently listed some surprising additional benefits of walking that you may not have heard before. Below are five benefits of being physically active, including walking, that [Harvard Health](#) noted from various studies.

**Walking counteracts the effects of weight-promoting genes.** Harvard researchers looked at 32 obesity-promoting genes in over 12,000 people to determine how these genes actually contribute to body weight. Their research showed that, among the study participants who walked briskly for about an hour a day, the effects of those genes were cut in half.

**Walking helps tame a sweet tooth.** Studies from the University of Exeter found that a 15-minute walk can curb chocolate cravings and even reduce the amount of chocolate you eat in stressful situations. The latest research confirms that walking can reduce cravings and intake of a variety of sugary snacks.

**Walking reduces the risk of developing breast cancer.** An American Cancer Society study discovered that women who walked seven or more hours a week had a 14% lower risk of breast cancer than those who walked three hours or less per week. Walking also provided this protection for women with breast cancer risk factors, such as being overweight.

**Walking eases joint pain.** Several studies have found that walking reduces arthritis-related pain. Walking five to six miles a week can even prevent arthritis from forming in the first place! Walking protects the joints like the knees and hips, which are most susceptible to osteoarthritis, by lubricating them and strengthening the muscles that support them.

**Walking boosts immune function.** Walking can help protect you during cold and flu season. A study of over 1,000 men and women found that those who walked at least 20 minutes a day, at least five days a week, had 43% fewer sick days than those who exercised once a week or less. And if they did get sick, it was for a shorter duration, and their symptoms were milder.

Whether you are competitive by nature and want bragging rights for the March Into May Challenge or want to improve your overall health, you may be looking for ways to increase your

daily step count. So, how can you fit more steps per day into your routine? Below are some ways to get those extra steps in.

- **Park further away.** Park your car at the far end of the lot and get some bonus steps on your way to and from your vehicle.
- **Pace during your next phone call or TV show.** A half-hour phone call or TV show can put you hundreds or thousands of steps closer to your goal.
- **Take a walk at lunch.** When lunch is over, take a quick stroll around the block before going back to work. The fresh air will do you good!
- **Add some accountability.** Post your goals on social media, or take on a personal challenge on your favorite fitness apps to keep yourself accountable to your goals.
- **Take the stairs.** Avoid escalators and elevators. By foregoing elevators, you will use less energy and get a personal energy boost from the activity.
- **Take your dog for a walk.** Schedule some extra playtime for your dog. Your pet will love the extra time outdoors!
- **Walk your child to school.** Skip waiting in the endless carpool line.
- **March in place.** Do this during simple activities like brushing your teeth. Try these [exercises while brushing your teeth](#), or check out this [2-minute leg exercise](#) routine.
- **End your trip early.** Get off the bus or train a block or two from your destination and walk the rest of the way.
- **Find a new local establishment.** Explore the neighborhood on foot to find some new lunch or dinner spots that are within walking distance of your home.
- **Set an hourly alarm.** Many fitness trackers have hourly buzzers to get you up and moving. You can also set an alarm on your phone or computer.
- **Take a walk after dinner.** Instead of flopping in front of the TV or computer, take 30 minutes and enjoy an evening stroll.
- **Try a walking workout.** YouTube has dozens of free walking workouts to choose from. Try this [1 Mile At Home Walking Workout](#) or this [1 Mile Happy Walk](#) that you can also do from home. Looking to mix things up? Check out this [HIIT Walk At Home Workout](#).
- **Go geocaching.** Try out [geocaching games](#) with the family and rack up steps while you have fun!

Incorporating more walking into your daily routine can be easy, and fun too. By taking even just a few of these ideas, you will be able to turn your daily step goal into reality in no time. Additionally, check out the six apps to track your steps and physical activity below, and as always, please [be safe while walking!](#)

- [Map My Walk](#)
- [Map My Run](#)
- [Walkmeter Walking & Hiking GPS by Abvio](#)
- [Argus by Azumio](#)
- [Fitbit App MobileTracker \(no Fitbit required\)](#)
- [Charity Miles](#)