

Lesson 2 Building a Healthy Life

The Joy of Walking

How much time do you spend sitting per day?

Studies have found that one-third of the global population aged fifteen years and older engage in insufficient physical activity. In particular, teenagers spend too much of their time sitting down and seldom do they engage in active physical activities on a regular basis.

The scientific community has even coined the term "sitting disease" for this phenomenon in order to represent the harmful health effects that result from long periods of sitting. The longer you sit, the more exposed you are to the dangers of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and even depression. Walking, according to health experts, is one of the safest, easiest, and cheapest forms of exercise to combat sitting disease.

Walking is not only a simple way to avoid the harmful effects of sitting disease, but it also has other health benefits. You may already be aware of the health benefits of walking, such as bone strengthening, blood pressure reduction, and improved heart health. But did you know that walking can help lower your cravings for sugary foods? According to research by the University of Exeter, taking daily walks for fifteen minutes can cut chocolate consumption in half. This is because frequent physical activity can enhance brain function, making it easier to limit our consumption of sweet foods such as chocolate. Moreover, walking can keep you from getting sick during the cold and flu season. A study found that people who walked for at least twenty minutes a day, five days a week, had 43% fewer sick days than those who exercised once a week or less. And even if they did get sick, it was for a shorter period of time with milder symptoms. This is primarily due to the improved immune system that results from walking regularly.

In addition to the physical benefits, walking has been found to improve our creativity. Researchers at Stanford University presented data on the association between walking and creativity. The participants who walked for five to sixteen minutes showed an average 60% increase in creativity, compared to those who remained sitting. This was mainly because the areas of the brain responsible for learning and memory worked more efficiently when people walked. It is no wonder that Steve Jobs came up with some of his most brilliant ideas while walking, and much of his company's design process was developed during walking meetings with his staff.

Despite the importance and benefits of walking, as students, finding the time to include it in your daily lives may appear challenging or bothersome. Even when you have time, you may dismiss the thought of walking. Instead of walking, you might prefer to connect with friends on social media or watch TV at home. But walking can be fun. Here are some simple ways to make walking enjoyable for you.

Get Your Groove On

A "music walk" is a great way to make walking feel less like a workout. All you will need is a smartphone with a music streaming app and a good pair of walking shoes. Additionally, you can bring a pair of earphones in case other people are disturbed or annoyed by your music. You can create playlists for different moods or circumstances. Are you going for a walk at sunset by the lake? Create a playlist of calm and relaxing tunes to help you appreciate the peaceful environment. Going for a power walk to enjoy the autumn breeze? Fill your playlist with energetic songs that will motivate you to walk harder. So grab your phone, put on your walking shoes, and let the rhythm move you!

Walk and Talk

Having a walking buddy can really motivate you to lace up the sneakers if you feel lonely or bored when walking alone. When you make plans to walk with a friend, you are more likely to follow through since you do not want to let your friend down. Additionally, having someone to chat with can help you forget that you are even exercising, making the time fly by. You will find yourself so engaged in conversation that you will not even realize how far you have walked. Moreover, with a friend by your side, you will have someone to share the beauty of your surroundings with, making your walks more exciting and engaging.

Make It a Challenge

Set a goal for the number of steps you want to take per day or week, and then work toward it. Using a smartphone app, keep track of your daily steps. Increasing your step count over a few weeks would be challenging yet rewarding. You do not need to set aside time for this walking challenge. You can take part in the challenge by walking during your lunch break, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or walking in place while brushing your teeth. You can even make walking a social media challenge and get others to join you.

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Space Out!

The human brain makes up only about 3% of our body weight but consumes approximately 20% of the body's energy. It manages all our thoughts, behavior, feelings, and movements in daily life. An unhealthy brain can hinder body movements and disrupt normal living, even if the body is fine. Just like our bodies, our brains need rest to stay healthy. Spacing out, often referred to as a state of not having specific thoughts, can provide our busy brains the chance to rest. Research shows that short periods of spacing out can enhance memory, learning, and creativity. For example, a study at Cornell University found that participants who rested and did nothing could recognize faces faster and more accurately than those engaged in other activities. Research in Japan also presented concrete evidence that resting without specific thoughts improved blood flow in the brain and facilitated swift idea generation. Spacing out does not mean that brain activity completely halts. In 2001, American scientist Dr. Marcus Raichle discovered that certain brain areas are active while people are spacing out with closed eyes and silent minds.

Taking short breaks without specific thoughts activates these areas, allowing the brain to reset and function better. During these breaks, the brain organizes acquired information, creating an improved environment for engaging in dynamic activities. How about spacing out for a few minutes whenever you are very busy?