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Step up your routine

Road to fitness begins with the first 10,000 steps

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Ten thousand steps for a human's personal health.

One giant step for humankind's fight against obesity.

Tackling America's weighty problem is a huge mission. But all of us would be healthier and wealthier if each of us would invest in an item that costs about \$20 - a pedometer - and start walking.

Dr. James O'Keefe of Cardiovascular Consultants, for one, would like to see a pedometer on everyone and applauds the idea of each person walking up to 10,000 steps a day, an initiative of the Shape Up America! organization founded by former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.

"The human body is genetically made to be physically active," says O'Keefe, who also is director of preventative cardiology at Mid-America Heart Institute in Kansas City. "Obesity has increased 100 percent in the last decade. American calorie consumption has increased 150 calories a day - that's one cookie. But we are burning 300 fewer calories a day, which adds up."

By walking 10,000 steps (approximately five miles) each day, O'Keefe says, calories will be burned, metabolism will increase, and desire for food consumption will decrease. He also warns that unless exercise is added to any diet plan, weight loss cannot be maintained.

O'Keefe says walking 10,000 steps daily is a great incentive for the goal-oriented, even more so than spending 30 minutes each day in sustained walking, since people have all day to accomplish the goal. He realizes, though, that since most people now average 2,000 to 3,000 steps each day, working in those extra steps will take a conscientious effort.

So after attaching a pedometer, don't change your behavior the first week or so to note how many steps you're now averaging each day. Then build up to 10,000 steps over the next couple of weeks by following these suggestions:

- Park farther from the door at work or the supermarket than you normally do.
- Take the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator.
- Walk to the playground or park with your children.
 - Visit a work colleague instead of sending an e-mail or calling.
 - Hide the remote and get up to change the channel.
- Plan an after-dinner walk with your spouse, children or friends each evening.
- Take the dog for an extended walk each day.
- Build extra time into your schedule to walk, not drive, to locations within a mile or less from your home.
- Window shop.

For more information see www.shapeup.org and www.thewalkingsite.com.



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