

Exercise: Getting Into the Habit

By Dr. Michael Fedak, Esse Health Internal Medicine Physician

This is the first in a series of articles I will be doing regarding exercise. And since this is the first article, I will start at the beginning. For those of you who have never exercised, or who have not exercised in years, the best start is walking. It requires no special equipment other than a good pair of shoes. It can be done almost anywhere and almost any time.

A new walker should start out for 20 minutes most days of the week. As you get in better shape, you should increase your time, and you will discover you can walk faster and not get any more out of breath. Walking will burn approximately 100 calories per mile walked – greater if you walk up hill or on an incline on the treadmill.

When walking, it is important to get your heart into the “**training range.**” To figure out your training range, take the number 220, subtract your age, and then multiply by 60-80 percent.

- For example: a 40-year-old person would take $220-40=180$. Sixty to eighty percent of that is 108-144. This is the training range, where you want your heart rate to be to get the most out of your exercise.

Now, for the elderly or people on medications that slow the heart rate, this formula does not apply. They would use what is called the **level of exertion test.**

- You need to walk fast enough that you feel mildly out of breath, but can still carry on a conversation. If you can talk nonstop, you need to speed up; if you are too short of breath to talk, slow down slightly.

People have many different goals for exercise.

- **If your goal is to help decrease your risk of having a heart attack**, then walking at the pace described above (either for the training range or level of exertion test) is all you need to do.
- **If you want to get fit**, this is not enough, but that is a totally different discussion.
- **If your goal is weight loss**, then we are talking calories, and the more you burn, the greater your success will be. In that regard, I am sorry to tell you, you have to sweat. Walking is a good start, but unless you power walk for hours a day, it alone will not be enough. Walking also does not tone muscles.

There is no benefit to using the walking sticks you see people using to simulate cross country skiing. Also, although walking with a hand or ankle weight can help you to burn more calories, it can also increase your risk of injuring a joint or tendon. It would be better to increase your walking time and walk farther.

Next month I will discuss ways to increase the intensity of your exercise when you are ready to advance past walking.



WeWantYouWell@essehealth.com or 314-851-1111