



The Good Health Herald

A newsletter for participants in the Sound Steps walking program

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Walking: The 'wonder drug'

Sound Steppers reap the rewards of better health and lasting friendships

Last year, Kathleen Seaholm couldn't muster the motivation to walk – *really* walk – for exercise. Going out alone, with no one to talk to, made it just too easy to turn around. She needed a group.

So when Sound Steps started up last summer, she was only too eager to join. Now, Kathleen and an expanding group of friends she met through Sound Steps walk twice a week, year-round, rain or shine.

"We don't do casual strolls," says Kathleen, who keeps a brisk pace on routes of up to three miles.

The 64-year-old Loyal Heights resident has lost 20 pounds and found relief for her arthritis. She knows first-hand the amazing benefits of regular exercise. Now, she's the one trying to motivate others.

Think about it. What pill or gizmo can rightly claim to:

- Relieve stress and anxiety
- Boost immunity

- Improve mood
- Increase energy
- Sharpen the brain
- Strengthen the heart
- Build bones and muscles
- Facilitate weight loss, and
- Protect against disease!

Those who make exercise a regular part of their lives lower their risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Even people with existing health conditions can benefit from physical activity. For example, exercise can significantly ease joint swelling for arthritis sufferers and help diabetics control blood sugar levels.

So how much is enough? The Surgeon General recommends at least 30 minutes of accumulated physical activity most days of the week.

And you're never too old to start. (One of the walkers taking part in Sound Steps in Kirkland is 93.)

The key is finding an activity you enjoy and can stick with. Walking fills that bill for the hundreds of older adults participating in Sound Steps

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Sound Steppers (left to right) Marcella Hargrove, Kathleen Seaholm and Laura Burgi go for a morning walk at Golden Gardens Park.

Exercise caution to avoid injuries

So you've finally started walking after years of... *ahem*... not walking. You feel virtuous. You feel strong. Today the neighborhood. Tomorrow the world!

Hold on. While you may be tempted to press pedal to the medal in your zeal to get in shape, your long-idle body needs to take it slow and easy. The last thing you need is an injury that puts you – and all that resolve – back in park.

Keep these things in mind when beginning to exercise:



Build up gradually. If you've just started walking, you might walk just 10 minutes the first two weeks, then increase your walk time by 10- to 15-minute increments. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise five or more days a week to reap health benefits.

Warm up and cool down. Before your workout, warm up by marching in place and moving your arms, then gently stretch your legs, arms and back. Don't bounce. Stretch again after exercising.

Drink plenty of water. Down 10 to 16 ounces of water two hours before your walk or workout. During the first hour of exercise, drink 5 to 12 ounces of water every 15 min-



utes. Cap off your activity with at least another 8 ounces.

Invest in good gear. Wear quality walking shoes that fit your feet properly and offer cushion and support.

Mind the weather. Wear lightweight, light-colored clothes. Avoid walking outside during hot afternoon hours. If it's cold, dress in layers.

Body knows best. Listen to your body. Lightheadedness, breathlessness, headache, excess sweating and pain are the body's way of telling you to ease up or stop. If you can't talk, you're working too hard.

Talk to your doctor. If you have any health conditions or have been sedentary, check with your doctor before beginning an exercise routine. See your doctor if pain and other symptoms you develop while working out don't go away.



The benefits of walking

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this summer, including some, like Kathleen, who began last year and never stopped.

As a walk leader and volunteer, she would like to see more people join the program.

"It's healthy mentally. It's healthy physically," she says. "If you are a person who's single and isolated, get out and walk with your neighborhood."

Jan Melin, the 68-year-old

walk leader in Rainier, decided to do just that. Though she also walks with her husband, she enjoys a more congenial pace with her three Sound Steps companions. In fact, they do as much talking as walking.

"We've elected the new president, we solve our grandchildren's problems and we get everything in order," she jokes.