

BODY • MIND • SPIRIT

WALKING TO BETTER HEALTH AND FITNESS BY BETTINA MARKS

The pleasures and benefits of walking are not new. Walking can be motivating, it stimulates the circulatory system and builds character. At least, isn't that what your mother always told you?

"Take a walk," which can be taken to mean "get out of my face," or "leave me alone," may be a beneficial suggestion. Have you ever fought with your loved one and either told them to "take a walk" or needed one yourself? "Walking off" that tension and heightened anxiety will produce a calm, more serene and peaceful state. But why?

Releasing endorphins, stimulating serotonin, raising your heart rate and metabolism and breathing fresh air are all very therapeutic and are all effects of walking. It's one of the best forms of cardio exercise for those who have been inactive for a long time after an illness or accident, as well as those who are new to fitness, are very overweight, over 50, or for those who want to integrate a lower-impact cardio workout into their higher-impact fitness routines. And, you will see results.

A person's weight is largely affected by balance of calories—that is, how many you burn versus how many you eat each day. To lose weight, you need to increase your activity to burn more and/or eat fewer calories each day. A pound of fat equals 3,500 calories. To lose one pound a week you'll need to expend 3,500 more calories than you eat that week, whether through increased activity or decreased eating, or both.

Weight-times-distance equals energy used walking, but distance is more important than the time spent. If you speed up to a brisk 13-minute-per-mile level, you'll be burning more calories per mile. For most beginning walkers, it's best to increase the distance before working on speed. A simple rule of thumb is 100 calories are burned per mile for a 150-pound walker.

Pam Ruderman, fitness director at Sky Athletic Club in Rockville Centre, recommends a walking program for clients who are 20 pounds overweight, because there is less impact on the joints. She suggests you begin with a 10- or 15-minute workout if the goal is for cardio-fitness, and build up to 20-30- or 60-minute sessions at a faster pace, depending on the level of fitness achieved. In order to burn calories, her strategy is to walk at a pace that facilitates the "talk test," where you "can carry on a conversation, but you shouldn't be able to sing at the top of your lungs." For more advanced clients, she recommends increasing the speed and varying the terrain by going outdoors to the beach or hilly terrain, or inside on the treadmill by walking on an incline, and building up to interval training. According to Ruderman, "As you increase the metabolic burn, you continue to burn calories after your workout."

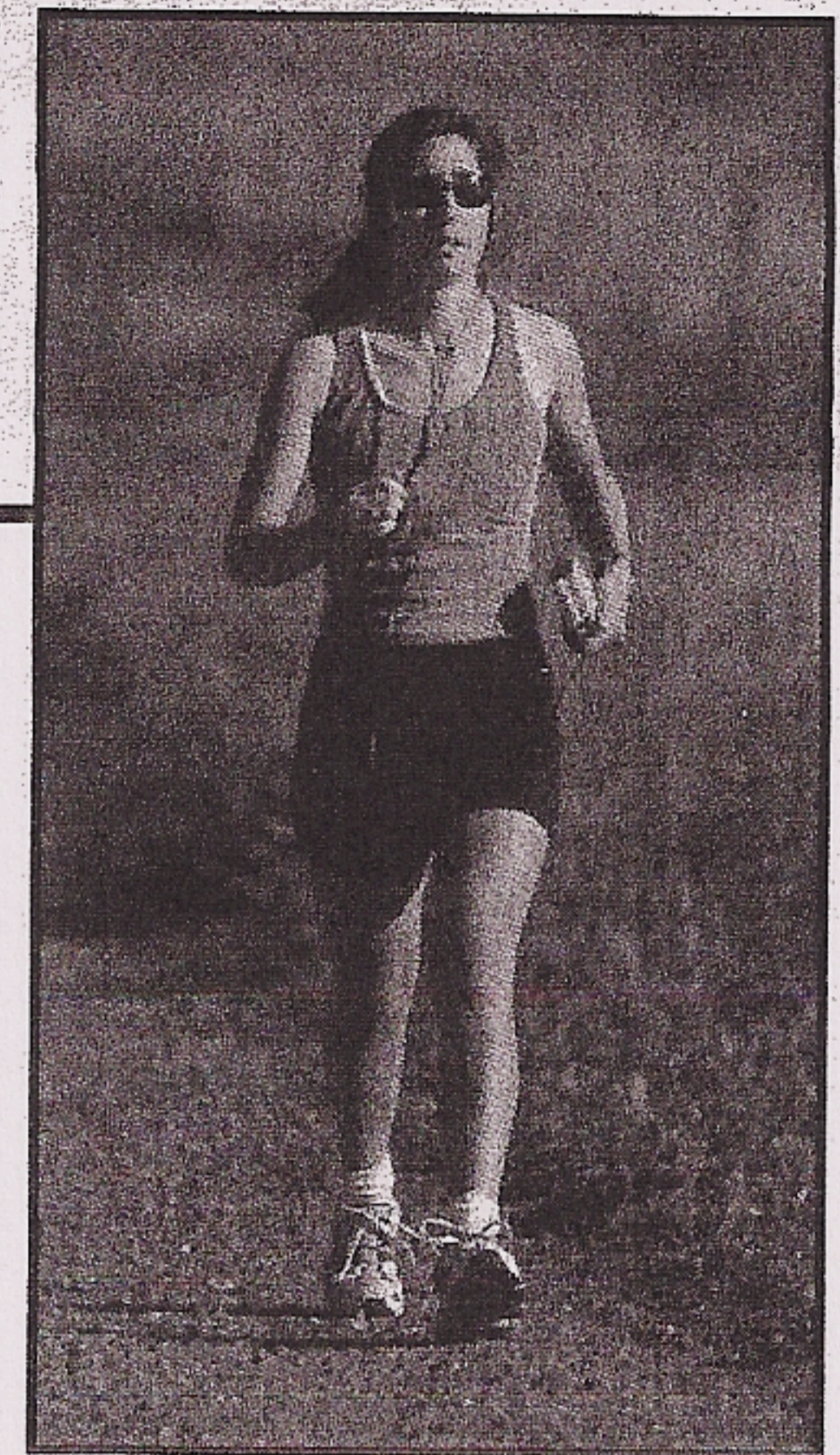
The first step in beginning a walking program is to make sure you have a good pair of shoes. They should be flexible, to avoid shin splints. If you twist them, they

should give easily and they should bend at the ball of the foot, not in the middle of the arch. If you set them down on the floor and poke the toe, the shoe should rock, because the toe should be slightly off the ground. Walking shoes should not have a high heel. The heel should be no more than an inch higher than the sole under the ball of the foot. Walkers strike first with the heel and roll through the step and there is no need for flared soles.

Stretching is very important for any fitness program, and walking is no exception. It's advisable to first do "easy" warm-up movements, like walking at a warm-up pace for five to 10 minutes and then begin arm circles and trunk rotations, twisting your upper body while your lower body remains stationary, as well as toe points and flexes and ankle circles—standing on one foot holding the other foot off the ground and making circles in the air with your toes, 10 circles in each direction, then changing feet. After your muscles are warmed up you can stretch anything that still feels tight. After-walk stretches should include a calf stretch, a hamstring and lower back stretch, an outer thigh, buttocks and spine stretch, a quadriceps stretch, shoulder stretch and neck relaxer.

Now that the weather is finally getting warmer, you can get outside and head to the boardwalks, trails, and many beaches on both of Long Island's shores to walk-off those winter doldrums and lose a few pounds. The Long Beach Boardwalk, which runs from New York Avenue east to Neptune Street, has made walking (and running) famous in Long Island since it was built. During the height of this winter, die-hards were out there doing their laps.

Now, however, is the best time to start your rigorous program and start counting your mileage. A one-way trip on the boardwalk is 2.3 miles. The salt air, majestic view and sound of the ocean will distract you from the mileage counter and transform your experience into a meditation. Also, at Robert Moses State Park, Field Five, there is a shorter boardwalk (under a mile), and a different view, for those who



like variety. Further down the beach nearing the lighthouse are two miles of trails through marshes that eventually lead to the oceanfront.

For those who like the adventure of wooded trails, there are walks in the woods along Long Island's Greenbelt trail, which stretches 32 miles along the Connetquot and Nissequogue Rivers. The winding National Recreation Trail goes from Heckscher State Park on the Great South Bay to Sunken Meadow bluffs on the Long Island Sound, or, if you wish, try the Long Island Pine Barrens Trail, which encompasses nearly 50 miles of footpaths in eastern Suffolk. The Nassau-Suffolk Trail, 20 miles between Massapequa Preserve on the South Shore and Cold Spring Harbor on the north, affords you a view of hawks, foxes and mountain laurel along your forest trek. Hiking through the eight-mile Walt Whitman trail through West Hills County Park will give you attractive views from Jaynes Hill, the highest point on Long Island. There are also frequent "charity" walks that you can participate in, such as those for breast cancer and AIDS, which will exercise your body and help you contribute to worthy causes at the same time.

Whether you are walking on the treadmill, where speed and incline are easily controlled, or in the great outdoors for adventure and fresh air, walking will help you lose weight and get fit. And, for those of you who would like to eventually get into running, you know that you have to first walk before you can run, right? ●

CALORIES BURNED PER MILE BY WALKING

Speed	Weight of Person Walking (in pounds)						
	100	120	140	160	180	200	220
2.0 mph	65	80	93	105	120	133	145
2.5 mph	62	74	88	100	112	124	138
3.0 mph	60	72	83	95	108	120	132
3.5 mph	59	71	83	93	107	119	130
4.0 mph	59	70	81	94	105	118	129
4.5 mph	69	82	97	110	122	138	151
5.0 mph	77	92	108	123	138	154	169
6.0 mph	86	99	114	130	147	167	190
7.0 mph	96	111	128	146	165	187	212

Source: About.com