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WALKING- NEED OF THE HOUR

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LETTER

Walking is a major component of daily physical activity, and is the most common form of exercise [1]. Walking is self regulated in intensity, duration and frequency, and can be an important indicator of a person's health and fitness status [2]. Among healthy individuals, 10,000 steps daily have been estimated to be of value in maintaining desired health benefits [3].

Walking is a complex activity which requires the cooperation and control of the whole body. Patients readily accept the necessity for practicing preparatory activities provided they can see and understand that they lead towards walking itself. Some principles are to be observed by the individual while walking such as

- To learn the correct pattern of walking from the start, because movement patterns learnt and repeated accurately become habitual very quickly.
- Sufficient aids must be provided to allow a correct pattern of walking. In many cases, the correct or optimum pattern of movement is only possible with the assistance of suitable support, e.g. parallel bars, crutches or sticks, to help balance or to reduce weight-bearing on one or both legs to an acceptable magnitude [4].

Previous studies have agreed that a higher level of physical activity extends life expectancy. [5, 6]. Walking is part of a physically active lifestyle. Studies have indicated that a longer time spent walking [7,

8]. walking pace [9, 10] and a longer distance walked [11, 12] are significantly associated with a decreased risk of mortality.

The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans state that “Adults should strongly consider walking as one good way to get aerobic physical activity. Many studies show that walking has health benefits and low risk of injury. The most widely accepted mode of physical activity is walking [13]. One study found that people aged 75 years or older who were randomised to an individually prescribed home-based exercise program, which included walking, reported fewer falls than those randomised to a control group [14]. However, another study that examined the effects of walking on bone mass density in post-menopausal women found that participants in a brisk walking group had higher fall rates compared to the control group [15]. A minimum of 30 minutes daily walking is recommended to achieve health benefits.

The results of the study by Dr. Rikke Krogh-Madsen, from the Centre of Inflammation and Metabolism in Copenhagen were published as a letter in the March 19, 2008 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The study used healthy young men in their mid-20s who were not overweight, were non-smokers, and who had no family history of

diabetes, medication use or other physical abnormalities. One group normally walked 6,000 steps per day, and a second group normally walked 10,000 steps per day. All were asked to reduce their walking by simple methods such as taking a car for short trips instead of walking or biking, and taking elevators instead of stairs. After cutting their steps to fewer than 2,000 steps per day, in both groups the amount of insulin circulating in their blood climbed 60%. Researchers say this is a sign that the body is no longer efficiently processing energy from food and is increasing insulin to try to process the food energy. This effect was seen with only two weeks of reduced activity. In the group that normally walked 10,000 steps per day, cutting their steps to under 2,000 produced additional increases in heart disease risk factors. Triglyceride and C-peptide levels increased and they had a 7% gain in abdominal fat without overall weight gain. The researchers were amazed that these healthy young men had impaired metabolisms in only two weeks, without the usual warning sign of weight gain [16].

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