

Walk On! June 2010

By: Stephen Anable



Yes, the pollen has turned many of our cars dusty yellow in the morning, but, after a long winter of indoor isolation, spring is blooming and summer beckons. This is an ideal time to begin, renew, or continue walking, one of the most efficient, accessible, and effective forms of exercise for older adults or anyone else.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, one way to make walking a permanent part of your weekly routine is to complete the Walk With Ease program, offered through the Healthy Living Center of Excellence. Designed by the Arthritis Foundation, it can aid anyone seeking to reap the benefits of exercise.

This evidence-based program is proven to increase your balance, strength, and pace of walking; boost your confidence in your ability to be physically active; and improve your overall health—in addition to reducing painful symptoms of arthritis. It comes with a comprehensive guide to help you develop a walking plan that meets your needs, stay motivated, and manage your pain, all while exercising safely.

The course can be completed on your own, using the handy guidebook, or taken with a group. Group sessions meet three times a week for six weeks. Each session begins with a trained leader discussing a topic related to arthritis, followed by a 10- to 40-minute workout featuring warm-up and cool-down periods.

We all know we should walk, but some of us avoid the stairs or choose to surf the web rather than take a hike. Some of us who complain that a busy schedule prevents us from walking may be avoiding the commitment because it strikes us boring. If boredom is discouraging you from walking, try varying your route or walking through an environment rich with visual stimulation, like a zoo, a city street, or a botanical garden.

If you have a chronic health condition, consult your doctor before beginning any exercise plan. The Arthritis Foundation suggests that if you are bothered by foot pain when walking you should check your shoes and socks to be sure they're in good condition; you may need to buy a new pair. If the pain persists, tell your doctor. If you experience difficulty walking for longer periods, you may need to trim back the minutes you walk or choose a more suitable surface, for example, gravel instead of asphalt.

Walking doesn't require investing in costly equipment, so grab some comfortable footwear and a friend or go solo. You may meet new people, discover unfamiliar neighborhoods in your town, and liberate your dog from the confines of the back yard. And, after the cocooning imposed by the pandemic, you'll emerge—cicada-fresh—into a renewed world.

By experimenting, you'll discover a way of walking that works for you—in terms of its style and many benefits. For more information about Walk With Ease, contact the Healthy Living Center of Excellence at 978-946-1211.