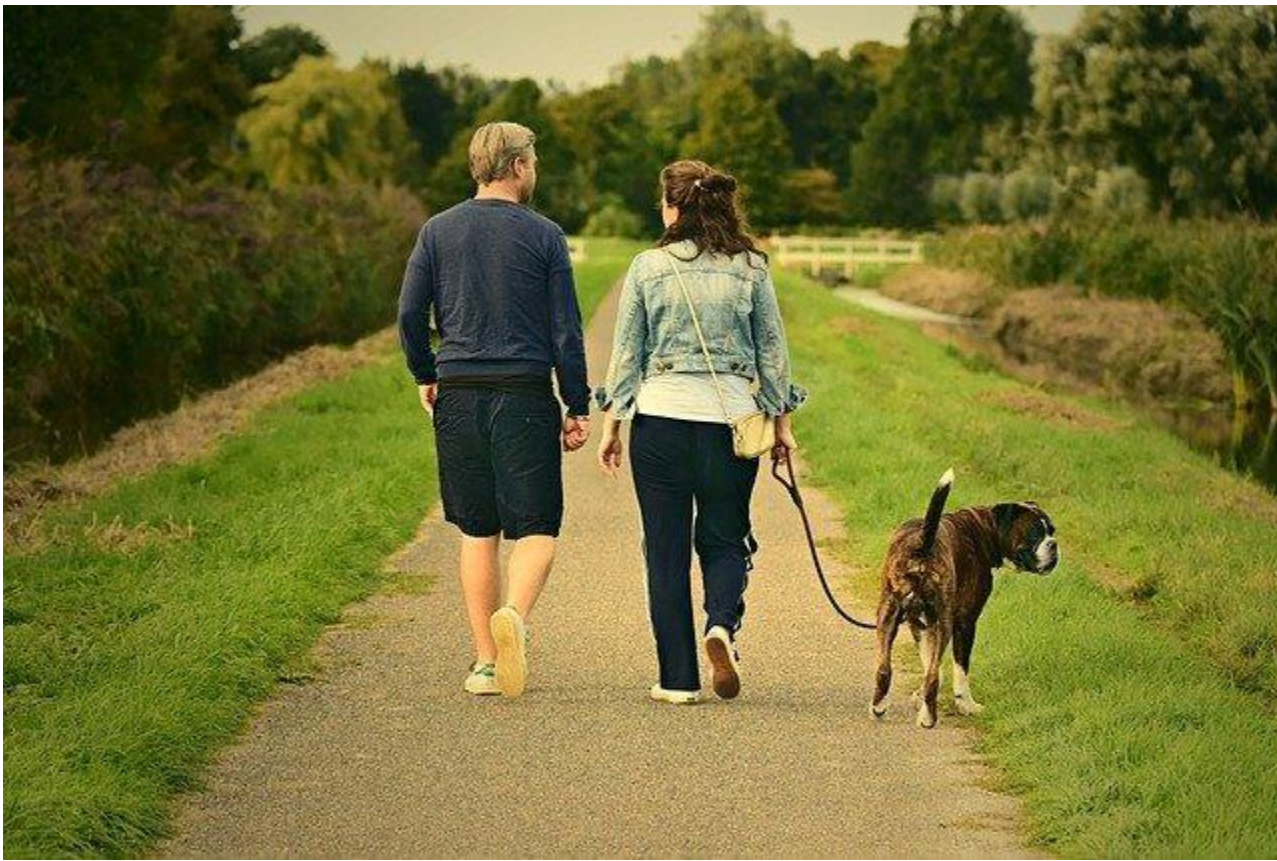


For Your Health Add Some Steps to Your Spring This Year

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ALTON - Physical activity is good for us, we all know. Yet it can be hard to fit into our daily schedules – and it's easy to understand why. Family, school, work and other important obligations can take up a lot of our time and energy.

But there is one healthy activity most of us can fit into a packed schedule – and it's often hidden in plain sight: walking. You may not see it highlighted often by social media influencers, but for something so simple it has a huge amount going for it.

“Walking has far-reaching benefits, including reduced anxiety and depression, improved mobility and cardiovascular health, increased brain function, weight loss, and it adds years to life,” said Liz Salerno, an assistant professor in the division of public health sciences at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

And you don’t need to walk a huge amount to benefit. While a popular goal is 10,000 steps per day (about five miles), studies have found that walking even half of that can help people live longer. More, though, is usually better, but only up to a point. Health gains begin to taper off when you hit 10,000 steps or more per day, Salerno continued. “The sweet spot – with the biggest gains – seems to be around 7,000-8,000 steps,” she said. If you’re starting a new walking program, or are re-starting one after winter or extended pandemic time off, a good goal is just to get moving a little more than usual. Take things slowly and include some rest days between walking sessions, initially. And know that even short walks can add up to big benefits down the road.

“Start with a walk to the end of the block and back, then over time you can make your way around the block,” Salerno said. “Before long, you’ll be strolling around the neighborhood. And remember that you don’t have to break a sweat to benefit.”

Keeping track of your progress is easier than ever these days. Inexpensive pedometers do a great job of tracking steps, as do fitness trackers, smartphones, and many watches. Just remember to take one on your walks.

And adding steps to your day can be easier than you think. You don’t need to log them in one big walk, unless you want to. Small bits add up, like taking the dog out for a quick walk after dinner, taking stairs instead of the elevator, getting off the bus a stop or two early and walking the rest of the way, or walking your kids home after school or daycare.

If it’s hard to walk safely around your area, some extra planning can help. Indoor malls or recreation centers are great places to get in some steps. At home, you can stream walking videos or listen to podcasts while pacing some laps in a hallway. And if you walk outside, try to choose safe routes, dress for the weather, wear bright or reflective clothes so cars and cyclists can see you, and take a friend or two, which can make it more fun, as well.

After a long winter, the warmer, longer spring days can be just what we need to start adding steps to our days and giving our health an extra boost. While walking may not get much fanfare, it sure should.

“It’s a great way to live a physically active life without needing fancy equipment or a gym membership,” Salerno said. “No tools required besides your own two feet!”

Dr. Graham A. Colditz, associate director of prevention and control at Siteman Cancer Center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, is an internationally recognized leader in cancer prevention and the creator of the free prevention tool YourDiseaseRisk.com. Alton Memorial Hospital is a member of the Siteman Cancer Network.