

## Pedometer a good first step toward fitness

by Ven\_Griva

It's sad but true: Almost half of all U.S. adults fail to get enough exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle and a healthy weight. And if they were to believe what they see on television, the answer is joining a gym or buying an exercise machine.

But recent research out of Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., published in the Nov. 21 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that a practical solution need cost no more than \$10. That's how much it would cost to buy an inexpensive pedometer, the simple device that counts how many steps a person takes in a day.

When the device was paired with a goal for steps taken per day, researchers found, the results were inspiring.

"Much to my surprise, these little devices were shown to increase physical activity by 2,000 steps, or about 1 mile of walking per day," said the study's lead author, Dr. Dena Bravata. "This goes a long way toward helping people meet the national guideline's for daily physical activity.

Guidelines from Department of Health and Human Services recommend that adults get at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity. Several organizations, such as the American Heart Association and Shape Up America, founded by former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop, recommend that adults walk up to 10,000 steps per day.

In recent years as medical science has recognized the benefits of walking, pedometers have become more available and more sophisticated. They can be found at the corner drugstore, or in sporting goods emporiums.

A simple pedometer keeps track of steps taken during a period of time, usually one day. More sophisticated pedometers allow the walker to input personal information - such as weight, height and length of stride - and can tell you how far you have walked in miles or kilometers, how many steps you've taken and how many calories you have burned.

In a review of previous studies, Stanford researchers have found that use of a pedometer, especially with a daily step goal, can get people to walk up to one mile more per day. They also discovered that simple increase in physical activity can help people to reduce their weight and blood pressure.

More than 45 percent all U.S. adults fail to get adequate physical activity and approximately 25 percent take no part in leisure-time activity at all, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

"The costs associated with physical inactivity are high. For example, if 10 percent of adults in the United States began a regular walking program, an estimated \$5.6 billion in heart disease costs could be saved," Bravata and her team write.

For their study, Bravata's team evaluated the association between pedometer use, physical activity and health outcomes among adults. They combed through data from 26 pedometer studies that included almost 2,800 participants.

The participants' average age was 49 years and 85 percent were women. The average length of the individual walking studies were 18 weeks. In 18 weeks, the average weight loss for a 200-pound person in the study was more than 2 1/2 pounds.

Bravata and her team found pedometer users in the randomized trials increased their physical activity by 2,183 steps per day, roughly the equivalent of walking 1 mile.

Study participants also saw improvements in their blood pressure readings. By lowering their blood pressure levels, walkers decreased their risk of stroke by 10 percent, and their risk of death from vascular causes by 7 percent.

Overall, pedometer users increased their physical activity by close to 27 percent. Having a step goal appeared to be the key predictor of increased physical activity.

"People don't always achieve it, but just having a goal seems to help them stay motivated and improve their physical activity," Bravata said.

E-mail Ven Griva or write to P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112.

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