

Walking's benefits go beyond exercise

August 31 2012, by Helena Oliviero

More Americans are going for a walk, a promising trend to help fight obesity and improve overall health, according to a new study released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Overall in the United States, 62 percent of people reported walking at least once for 10 minutes or more during the previous week in 2010. That's up from 56 percent in 2005.

And while the percentage of walkers in the South still lags behind other parts of the country, it saw the largest jump in walking, according to the [CDC](#). In the region that includes Georgia, 15 other states and Washington, D.C., 57 percent of people walked in 2010, up from 49 percent in 2005, according to the CDC. People in the West are most likely to walk, with more than two-thirds of people there regularly walking.

Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the CDC, said walking for as little as 10 minutes a week is a great first step toward meeting the recommended amount of 150 minutes per week of physical activity.

"Physical activity really is a wonder drug," Frieden said during a recent news conference. "It makes you healthier and happier; you live longer." Frieden listed a slew of [health benefits](#) from walking and other forms of aerobic exercise. They included lowering the [risk of heart attack](#), stroke and diabetes, and helping get a better night's sleep.

Even if you don't lose weight from walking, walkers can still reap health

benefits from this low-impact form of exercise.

Walking, he said, has a lot going for it: It doesn't cost anything, you don't have to join a gym, and walking is something that most people are able to do their whole lives.

The CDC study found [walkers](#) are nearly three times more likely to meet exercise recommendations than those who don't walk at all.

Still, more steps are needed. A third of Americans still don't get any [physical activity](#), according to recent National Health Interview Surveys.

Judi Mason of Atlanta walks for exercise - as well as to help fight stress and "clear her head." Up until recently, Mason used to work out at a gym and only walked on her "off" days.

But during the past year, back issues forced Mason to settle on low-impact walking as her go-to form of exercise. Mason said she's been pleasantly surprised by the benefits of walking at Piedmont Park. She now walks about 2 miles five or six days a week.

She said she feels like she's getting a decent workout from her brisk walks, and she's considering walking with 1- or 2-pound weights.

"I've also found that I really like being outdoors and I am a people person," said Mason, who is 45 and works as a writer. "It's easier to strike up a conversation with someone at the park than at the gym." In Duluth, Karla Moore, a dating coach, believes walking can help people find mates.

"It is a known fact that being fit is one of those universal lifestyle qualities that initiates attraction. ... I tell my clients that they do not have to be a size 6, just commit to a goal that is within reason and use walking

as a way to get there," Moore said.

She said the idea of going to the gym for a complete overhaul can be daunting. Meanwhile, walking, she said, is a "very benign way to exercise." Moore used to run in college, but now she walks regularly with her husband, Michael, along a 200-acre park near their subdivision.

Walking, she said, helps keep the spark of their marriage alive.

Said Moore, "It's really nice to have that time together."

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TIPS FOR WALKING

1. Get out the leash and walk your dog. It's a great activity for both man and man's best friend.
2. Take your child for a brisk walk. It's an excellent way to get some one-on-one time. Spice up your routine by exploring new neighborhoods or turning your walk into a scavenger hunt.
3. Mall walk. Are you sweating at the idea of walking outside? Take a brisk stroll around your local mall instead. Window shop, people watch and give your heart a workout in a climate-controlled environment.
4. Walk and talk. Even if you're glued to your phone for work calls, you don't have to be glued to your seat. Make it a habit to talk and walk. Some workplaces have paths to make it easier to burn while you earn.
5. Park and walk. How many times have you circled the parking lot to find "the" spot? Spare yourself the stress and gain more energy by parking far away and [walking](#) farther to your destination.

6. Take the stairs. The elevator may go up - but it doesn't make your heart rate climb. Take the stairs instead. For more tips and ideas, go to www.startwalkingnow.org.

SOURCE: American Heart Association

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