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Walking toward well-being: America's favorite exercise

Walking is the most popular exercise in America. It's easy, it's cheap and it's good for you. Here are some resources if you live around Seattle and Puget Sound.

By **Richard Seven**
Seattle Times staff reporter

Walking is by far the most popular exercise in the nation.

Why?

It's easy, convenient, and *cheap*. It's versatile, too. Walking gets you from points A to B — with fresh air and a view. It can relax and soothe, or help burn calories, build muscle tone and improve balance. It's easy, but you can make it more challenging if you want a workout.

And it is perhaps the most social exercise. It could even be argued that we'd be nicer to each other if we walked more. Ever see pedestrians make obscene gestures to each other?

So what's your route? Do you set goals? How do you make it interesting? What shoes or other accoutrements should you buy? The beauty of walking is that there are no absolute answers.

It's social

Ali Terpening, who lives in Seattle's Belltown, moved from New York two years ago and soon got frustrated by how hard it can be to strike up a friendship with people here. As often is heard from transplants, she found us nice, but not *friendly*.

So she started her "urban hikers" club for people 50 and older. It started with five walkers, but about 500 have participated since she began it. The starting points and routes change. It can be Fremont-Ballard one time and a Bainbridge Island loop another.

The walks generally range from two to five miles and she and her assistant organizer, Dave Blaum, will adjust the difficulty depending on who's there. But they walk and talk, rain or shine.

"I think it has taken off because there are many transplants in Seattle who were having a hard time

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enlarge ALAN BERNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES
Walking gets you from point A to B and it's easy exercise. A walker takes canine companions along the foot of Union Street in Seattle.

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Soles for souls

Give those old walking shoes a higher purpose by donating them to **Soles4Souls**, a charity that gives them to people in need across the world, including those who suffered from natural disasters.

To donate, see www.soles4souls.org/donate/

Just the facts

According to America Walks, a national coalition of advocacy groups dedicated to promoting walkable communities:• The average person takes 2,000 steps per mile. (10,000 a day is recommended for general health.)

- Although 41 percent of all trips made in the United States are two miles or less, fewer than 10 percent of trips are

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meeting anyone," she says. "And it's a great way to see the city. We get a lot of people from the suburbs, too. We're hoping to walk around Lake Union someday."

If you're interested in this group or hooking up with another — or starting your own — see Terpening's Web site at <http://walkers.meetup.com>, or look for other nearby groups at <http://walkers.meetup.com>, (where you'll find, for example, a Tacoma walking-with-dogs group, or a collaboration of Redmond/Kirkland moms-with-strollers).

It's meditative

Dan Tripps is director of the Seattle University Center for the Study of Sport & Exercise and consultant to Swedish Medical Center. So he knows about maximizing effort to achieve fitness. Walking, he says, can help lower blood pressure, stave off disease and improve sleep, just to name a few benefits.

He walks at least five miles a day for the peace it gives him. While walking, he finds himself contemplating everything from life's complexity and his values, to envisioning solutions to issues and alternating between recalling and dreaming.

"In a world fraught with video games, television, iPod, cellphones, faxes, e-mails and meetings, walking gives me time to engage in the disappearing art of reflection, experience beautiful scenery and recapture the sense of wonder from being alive," he says.

It's a workout

When residents of Madison Park and other neighborhoods around Lake Washington see Ken Mundt chugging along with the aid of his poles they imagine a guy yearning for the mountains. Only this is Mundt's year-round exercise, six miles a day, six days a week, in rain, snow or sunshine.

He began about five years ago as a way to help control his diabetes. He never liked jogging enough for it to become a habit, but like many who incorporate poles into their walks, he was looking for something more than a normal walk. He wanted to burn more calories and challenge his upper body, too.

"I never had an upper body before, but my wife says she's noticed a difference. It's a total workout, but I also kind of get in a zone," says Mundt, director of community involvement for IslandWood, a Bainbridge Island nonprofit that seeks to teach environmental stewardship to kids. "The 90 minutes goes fast. It is very meditative. I like being outside; I'm not a health-club guy."

There are various names and styles connected to walking with poles. Mundt, 58, calls his method "exerstriding" and says it combines the tranquility of walking with the added exertion of using his upper body. He lost 20 pounds in the first year and has since held his weight and diabetic condition stable.

While he uses poles he bought from Exerstrider.com, he says regular cross-country skiing poles could work, too, if you put rubber tips on their ends.

Gear up

taken by foot or bicycle.

- Half of all children walked or rode their bicycles to school in 1969. Today, about 15 percent do.

Source: www.americawalks.org

If You Go Trails, trails, trails

Here are sources of information on popular walking routes:

King County

Find online information on trails including Burke-Gilman, Sammamish River, Snoqualmie Valley and others at www.kingcounty.gov/recreation/parks/trails.aspx.

See an online map, "Regional Trails in King County," at <http://your.kingcounty.gov/gis/vmc/Recreation.htm#RT>

Or pick up a copy of the map at the King County Road Services Map Counter in the King Street Center, 201 S. Jackson St., Seattle.

Snohomish County

Find online information and maps for trails including Centennial, Interurban, Lord Hill and others at www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/Parks/Park_Information/Trails.htm

Seattle

Find tips on popular walking routes at www.mapmywalk.com/find-walk/united-states/wa/seattle and www.seattle.gov/parks/trails.asp.

Statewide

For the state Department of Transportation's online resource page with route maps, safety tips and much more, see www.wsdot.wa.gov/Walk

Rails to trails

Find information on railways that have been converted to trails: www.trailink.com/TrailSearch.aspx.

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CORRECTED: Updated video released of a puppy mill seizure in a Gold Bar home. Previous video showed part of a home other than the Gold Bar home owners.



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Foot Solutions, a Bellevue specialty shoe company, conducts a class it calls Balance Walking that incorporates fitness poles like Mundt's in tandem with its unique brands of shoes, such as Chung Shi shoes, which are designed to create a rolling effect and decrease heel impact. The idea is to provide relief to joints, but also improve posture, burn calories and challenge core muscles. (The store also sells MBTs, another popular "health shoe.")

The shoes take time to master and have such a distinct feel that they aren't for everyone. Judy Cocchiarella, co-owner of the Redmond-based franchise www.footsolutions.com and a certified pedorthist — a specialist in using footwear to solve foot and lower-limb problems — says the shoes are fitted to match the foot's flexibility and type along with the person's gait. They offer an alternative for people with foot problems or health conditions.

Pedometers or heart-rate monitors can help track your workout. The pedometer counts your steps and translates the number into distance. A heart-rate monitor tells you just how hard you're working and alerts you when you are working too hard.

And in the event you don't walk to meet people, reflect or train, you can always turn on your MP3 and wander.

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 As a non-driver and lifetime walker (I'm 74) I find it is very easy to incorporate this exercise every day by doing errands on foot. One of... Posted on May 21, 2009 at 7:32 AM by DabuGink. [Jump to comment](#)

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