

Walking: A Gift to Yourself



December is the time of year when we think about giving gifts to family, friends and special people in our lives. During the holiday season, especially, there seems to be an abundance of food and a lack of time. We indulge a little but know we are just adding calories, whether from cookies and candies made for loved ones, or the extra treats brought to the office. Sometimes, with all the stress of making holidays special for other people, we forget to take time for ourselves and make sure we have given ourselves a gift.

This year, give yourself the gift of good health. Do some walking every day. The many benefits of walking include:

- Reduced risk of coronary heart disease
- Improved blood pressure and blood sugar levels
- Help to maintain body weight and lowered risk of obesity
- Reduced risk of osteoporosis and some cancers
- Enhanced mental health
- Increased concentrations of norepinephrine, a chemical that can moderate the brain's response to stress.

Exercise in general also releases endorphins, which create feelings of happiness and euphoria. Regular physical activity boosts memory and ability to learn new things. Getting sweaty increases production of cells in the hippocampus that are responsible for memory and learning.

Another gift to yourself might be to find a friend that can walk with you. The thought of being alone can be enough to keep some people from walking. The best way to solve this is by finding a friend to walk with on a regular basis. You can plan walking paths that are convenient for both of you, or map out routes that take you places you've never been before. It's a great way to exercise, spend time with friends, and stay accountable to your new healthy habit!

Finally, give yourself the gift of clothing and shoes that will help make walking easier in all kinds of weather. Good shoes and clothes that are comfortable, yet protect you from the elements, will help you realize that you can walk in most types of weather and still be warm and dry.

Sources:

1. American Heart Association: <http://www.startwalkingnow.org/home.jsp>
2. Every Body Walk!: <http://everybodywalk.org/>



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