

The Power of Walking

By [Paul Chek, HHP, NMT](#)

Today, most civilized countries face the highest incidence of obesity, disease and orthopedic injury in almost every conceivable category on record. These types of health issues persist despite our vast quantity of medical technology and the presence of more doctors and health care professionals than ever in history. Given our resources and current state of health, one must surmise ... if there is anything we can do for ourselves, we best get moving!

There are a few factors that can be correlated to our declining health, such as:

- A tremendous increase in the consumption of medical drugs; an astonishing percentage of Americans are on at least one prescription drug. In 2000, 3 billion drug prescriptions were filled by pharmacies (1). In Dr. Mercola's words, " ... that's enough drugs for every man, woman and child to have a new prescription each month of the year!"(2)
- Increased consumption of caffeinated and sugar-laden beverages in place of water
- A massive decline in food quality secondary to depletion of soils and use of industrial farming technology as well as a huge increase in the quantity of processed foods
- Lack of exercise!

While I have a lot to say regarding all these points, and many more, it is this last point I would like to address herein.

While many of you could, and probably do, have reasons why you don't participate in a regular, structured exercise program, none of you can honestly say that you don't have time to walk! The human body is not only designed for daily movement, it is essential for optimal physiological function--which contributes to health and well-being. To demonstrate my point, consider the following benefits of simply walking.

Metabolism

Walking is one of the most primal movement patterns known to man. Because bipedal walking became essential to our survival as we progressed through the paleo-mammalian phase of human development into the neo-mammalian phase (fully upright), our bodies have developed in such a way that walking and movement are essential to health; as they say, form follows function.

Walking requires the integrated use of our arms, legs and torso. Hundreds of calorie-burning muscles are utilized by walking. Walking briskly on a daily basis not only results in the burning of calories, it increases enzyme activity and other metabolic activity. Eherenfried Pfeiffer, famous nutritionist, biochemist and understudy of Rudolph Steiner, suggests that walking as little as two miles may result in increased calorie consumption for up to 12 hours post movement (3); from clinical experience, I can assure you that the more deconditioned you are, the greater the metabolic effect of walking.

Increased metabolism doesn't only mean using more calories, it means your body is more likely to draw in nutrients from your foods and supplements. This is because of the supportive effects walking has on peristalsis (see below) as well as the overall stimulation of metabolism, assimilation and elimination. It also means your desire to drink more water will increase, supporting all your bodily systems of detoxification and elimination, as well as improving digestion.

Circulation of Vital Fluids

Walking results in rhythmic contraction and relaxation of muscles as well as rhythmic pressure changes in body cavities. This results in improved circulation of blood, lymph and even synovial fluid (the lubricating fluid made in joints). Because much of your immune

system travels through your body via the blood and lymphatic fluids, improving your circulation through daily walking can improve immune function, as well as your metabolism and health in general.

Cerebral spinal fluid is the special fluid that bathes and nourishes your nervous system. Unlike blood, which is assisted in its movement through the body by the heart, cerebrospinal fluid movement is dependent upon a number of pressure-wave influences that range from expansion and contraction of cranial sutures and pressure on the brain tissue, first by systolic pressure and then by diastolic pressure. Another factor assisting the flow of this vital fluid is breathing; inhalation lengthens the spine assisting cerebrospinal fluid flow back into the brain while exhalation achieves the opposite (4).

Steady state rhythmic walking further assists movement of body fluids. Steady state walking, or walking at a consistent effort, synchronizes breathing with movement, again causing wavelike pulsations throughout body cavities. You will notice that during relaxed walking, the number of steps per inhalation/exhalation cycle will self-regulate or synchronize. When you're walking and breathing synchronizes directly, or in an octave relationship with other fluid pressures and pulsations, movement of all major body fluids, including cerebrospinal fluid, is assisted. In a future article on the major pump systems of the body, we will explore the relationships between fluid movement, pumps and physical-emotional-mental and spiritual health.

Mobilization of Internal Organs

The rhythmic pressure changes produced by walking, which I've described above, also mobilize and massage your internal organs. This occurs as your diaphragm contracts rhythmically with the abdominal muscles to aid respiration, as well as stabilization of the body, the result of which is a massage for your internal organs. The movement, pressure changes and improved fluid transfer keep the internal organs mobile and healthy, improving their physiological functions individually and synergistically.

A typical example of a common internal organ dysfunction that often responds well to walking, hiking, or even climbing stairs is constipation. When people become sedentary, they lose the natural visceral mobilization provided by functional exercise. Couple this loss of needed activity with the dietary habits of modern man and you have constipation and a host of other reasons for the body to perform poorly!

In fact, today, it is common for people to report to hospital emergency rooms with terrible back and sciatic pain, only to be told that they are constipated and given a laxative, which frequently alleviates the back or sciatic pain. Consider that in the United States, laxatives are the third best-selling drugstore item, and most of the laxative customers would look and feel much better by merely walking as little as two miles a day and drinking daily an ounce of water for each two pounds of their body weight!

The P-M-E-S Connection

The human being is a unique organism in that we are physical (P)-mental (M)-emotional (E)-spiritual (S) beings. With only a little self-observation, you will quickly realize that any time your physical being is sluggish or functioning sub-optimally, your mental-emotional-spiritual well-being also suffers. Most of you would be surprised at the improved mental clarity and the emotional and spiritual well-being that results from walking a couple miles a day.

I frequently prescribe meditative walking for stressed business executives, a practice I learned from Master Fong Ha (5). With meditative walking, you need only set a comfortable pace and work to maintain a rhythmic relationship between the number of steps taken for each breathing cycle (one inhalation and one exhalation); for example, breath in for four steps, natural pause for one step and breath out for four steps. Keep this steady cycle and soon you will find that not only do your internal systems synchronize, your mind quickly empties.

If you find your mind jumping around, concentrate on breathing diaphragmatically, emphasizing inhalation through the nose. It is also beneficial to the breathing process to keep the tongue in the physiological rest position on the roof of the mouth, just behind the front teeth; it naturally goes there if you swallow or initiate the pronunciation of the letter 'L'.

Not only does keeping the tongue in its physiological rest position assist in deeper breathing by facilitating diaphragmatic breathing (6), the tongue is the energetic link between two of the primary energy meridians of the body (7). The microcosmic orbit is composed of two primary meridians, the Governing in the rear of the body and the Conception in the front of the body (Figure 1.). With inhalation, Chi, or life-force energy, rises from the anus, along the spine and over the head to the end of the Governing vessel at the point in the upper palate where the tongue naturally rests.

On exhalation, the Chi energy flows down through the tongue, neck and linea alba (central line between your abdominal muscles) to the anus. As you relax into your walking meditation, it is important to keep the tongue relaxed or circulation through the microcosmic orbit becomes diminished. With relaxation and practice, you will begin feeling the Chi flowing through the microcosmic orbit; most people can feel Chi flowing in the microcosmic orbit after one gong, which is 100 consecutive days of practice. I feel the minimum commitment should be 40 breath cycles, which is minimal considering you will breathe about 25,900 times a day anyway!

Time to Get Walking!

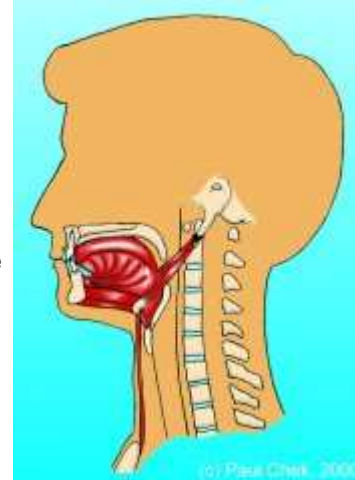
Now that you know walking can aid in improving your metabolism, body shape, energy levels, mental clarity, and most aspects of your well-being, it is time to stop driving around the parking lot at the shopping center for 10 minutes waiting for a spot to open up by the door! It is also time to stop riding elevators all the time, particularly since most of us need a lot more exercise! If you could use a little more vitality in your life, climbing a few stairs whenever possible will be a big step (literally) in the right direction.

Whenever you can get out into nature and walk or hike, you will always attain increased benefit. Uneven terrain stimulates the use of many different movement patterns, further assisting in massaging the organs, pressure changes and improved circulation. You also get a much-needed chance to breath fresh air and share your energy with Mother Nature's life forms. Put all this together and you should be able to easily sell yourself on the idea of going for a walk, one of the easiest ways in the world to reap benefits for your Physical-Mental-Emotional-Spiritual well-being!

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