

The Walking Diet: A New You In 4 Weeks!

PLANNING TO GET FIT IN 2004? THE MOST AFFORDABLE EXERCISE REGIMEN ALSO DELIVERS THE GREATEST BENEFITS FOR BODY, MIND AND SPIRIT.

I love beginnings. The good intentions that start any new endeavor are so exciting!

I love New Year's because it gives us that "fresh start" motivation. We are reminded of God's precious message that we can become new creations in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:17).

It doesn't matter what you did yesterday or who you were yesterday, you can do new things and be a new person today. You have choices, and you can start fresh right now.

This wonderful time of year finds many of us choosing to improve our lives as we move into another phase. And I have some important news to share with you that has been researched, studied and proven over and over again.

My news is this: Of all the lifestyle choices you can make to improve everything that is meaningful in your life, there is one choice that, above all, will bring more rewards and more benefits than any other choice you can make. The choice is this—to start walking.

I know that was a powerful statement, but ask yourself: What is most meaningful to you? I am going to guess that at the top of your list (as at the top of mine) are God's love, good relationships with family and friends, and good physical health for ourselves and those we love, to name the most important.

Just think of a life without God's presence. Scary. Think of a life with all your relationships in chaos. Very sad. Think of a life in which you are always sick, tired and depressed. That's very scary and sad.

At this new time of the year, I'm challenging you. Try this: Don't do anything new other than begin a walking routine. You'll be amazed at how rewarding it is and how much it will change the quality of your life.

PLAN YOUR WALKS AND DO YOUR WALKS

There are a host of things that a walking program will do for you. Here are just a few of the benefits you'll notice in mind, body and spirit.

You will feel better instantly. During brisk activity, very powerful chemicals called endorphins are released in our brains.

Endorphins benefit us in many ways. They block pain and usher in a cozy sense of well-being. And they enable us to think more clearly and feel optimistic about tomorrow.

Another benefit from walking is that the abundance of serotonin released in the brain will eliminate "the blues." It will balance your emotions, helping to control anger and relieve stress. You'll feel calm but energized!

You'll also feel empowered and strong. And an emotionally balanced you means your relationships will be strengthened.

You will see the difference. After a few short weeks, you'll notice slimmer legs, a reduced waistline, a well-proportioned body and toned arms. Simply put, you'll lose weight and improve your health.

For many, just losing a few pounds can have a big impact on overall health. Blood pressure will drop and will stay down with continued exercise, thereby reducing your risk of heart

disease.

Glucose (sugar) levels will go down, keeping you from adult onset diabetes. Brain function will improve, reducing age-related dementia.

Your heart and lungs will be strengthened and will transport oxygen and nutrient-rich blood to all parts of the body more often. Metabolism—the rate at which you use calories— will increase. This is the most important factor in weight loss.

The risk of stroke and most cancers will decrease significantly. The list of benefits is long!

Ladies in the “prime of life” have so much to enjoy. Now more than ever, as you approach and have to manage menopause, you need to keep walking as your medicine.

Movement is medicine. Active women have a much more positive experience when faced with changing hormone levels and their effects if they exercise regularly. Your doctor can discuss with you the documented research that will motivate you to keep up your walking regimen.

You’ll live the difference every day. Walking opens your mind; it also opens your heart. Physical fitness is connected to both mental fitness and spiritual fitness.

Walk with God! Pray as you go. Listen to spiritual music and worship as you walk.

The combination of worship and walking is one of the most life-enhancing activities you can do. Try it for yourself and let the Spirit move you!

Do you see the theme here? Do you know of any other healthy choice you can make that will offer you so many rewards for mind, body and spirit? If you know of something, please let me know about it too!

In this complicated world, the simple things really are the best things in life. And this is so simple; just walk more.

LEARNING TO WALK

I've devised a simple four-week plan to get you started on your way to lifelong wellness and health. Before you start, please check with your physician if you have any concerns at all about your health.

This plan is for all types of walking, whether it's outdoors, in a mall, on a treadmill or indoors using my Walk Away the Pounds In-Home Walking video programs. They are just the right thing when you can't get outdoors.

First, invest in good walking shoes. This is a small expense considering the other choice you have, which is to wear inexpensive footwear that doesn't provide adequate support and will cost you dearly in the end.

It is very expensive to be overweight and out of shape. On the other hand, it is (forgive the blunt language) "cheap" to be active and at a healthy weight.

I have several pairs of walking shoes. I keep one pair in my car, another pair at work and another at home.

Everywhere I go, if the opportunity is there, I walk. For example, while waiting for my children to finish their activities (sports, dance lessons and so on), I walk.

Here is one of my favorite tips, especially when I need to drop a few pounds: I walk for 10 minutes before I eat lunch. You can walk around your home, outdoors or around your office building at work. Why not walk the parking lot?

A 10-minute walk will boost your metabolism. Then lunch will keep it going through digestion. Your afternoons will be full of energy, without the slumps.

WHAT IS A WALK DIET?

This four-week plan is a way to improve your health while losing weight. Many fad food diets leave you tired, depressed and disappointed. But a walk diet will leave you in better physical shape as well as feeling more energetic and hopeful that you can reach your goal.

If your desire is to lose weight, start with this four-week plan. After 24 years in the business of health, wellness and weight loss I am more convinced than ever that we must take the focus off food and become more aware of our activity levels.

Too many times we start a “food” diet when we want to lose weight. We put all our time and energy into manipulating food and make no time for exercise or activity.

Usually, the diet slows our metabolism, causes our muscle mass to decrease and makes energy levels hit bottom. This is the perfect setup for gaining more weight when you stop dieting. But changing your approach by putting your time and effort into walking more is the new formula that most women need.

When starting this four-week plan, don't even think about food. Just eat as you normally would and live as you normally do. But don't miss your walk session!

After four weeks of making your walks a priority you may start to see that it isn't the food after all that puts on the extra pounds. Instead, it really is that we are all products of our modern world.

The more machines do for us, the fewer calories we burn and the easier it becomes to gain weight. Being too heavy increases our risk for all sorts of disease.

Please don't “out eat” all that wonderful walking. But again I say, take the focus off food. (And this is a tough one coming from an Italian girl who loves to eat!)

Be accountable for your portions. Consistent overeating is not in the plan for caring for this most magnificent “temple” that houses our spirit. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is the machine that moves your spirit through life, and it is made to perform at high levels when cared for in a balanced way.

That said, do you really need that extra helping? That snack? More dessert?

Active people are more likely to be in control of their food portions and to make healthier food choices. Become an active person first, and most likely you will want healthier foods in moderate portions.

If exercise and weight loss are heavy subjects and sometimes feel overwhelming, try the following reasons to stick to your walking plan:

- **Walking makes me feel healthy.
- **Walking makes me creative.
- **Walking makes me feel calm and happy for my family.
- **Walking strengthens my heart, bones and muscles.
- **Walking empowers me.
- **Walking boosts my immune system.
- **Walking eliminates my stress.
- **Walking improves my posture.
- **Walking manages my blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes.
- **Walking chases the “blues” away.
- **Walking gives my family and friends a better me.

Have I made the case for walking? If I have, why not gear up and get started on a walking diet today?

WEEKS TO A NEW YOU!

WEEK 1

Monday: Walk one mile, no matter how long it takes. Just walk.

Tuesday: Walk one mile.

Wednesday: Walk 1-1/2 miles. Try walking 10 minutes from your starting point, then turn around and walk 10 minutes back. Most likely, you'll cover 1-1/2 miles.

Thursday: No structured walk. Be mindful of each walking opportunity. Remember, stairs are better than elevators, standing is better than sitting, walking is better than riding. Walk the dog or play with the kids for 20 minutes after school.

Friday: Get the weekend off to an active start; walk two miles today.

Saturday: This is always the day I give it a boost. Walk three miles at a gentle pace. Don't worry about how long it takes. Just go.

Sunday: God's Day! No structured walks. To keep the day holy, try a group walk. Invite friends or family members, and as you walk together, share the things that each of you are thankful for. Count your blessings as you count your miles.

WEEK 2

Monday: Walk two miles.

Tuesday: Walk one mile.

Wednesday: No structured walks today. Have you tried a step counter (pedometer)? They are easy to find in sporting goods stores, are very inexpensive and may motivate you to walk more through your day. When using one, wear it a full day, from the time you wake until bedtime. Ten thousand is the number of steps that many health organizations consider a health-improving, active day. Do you know how many steps you take in your average day? You'd be amazed!

Thursday: Walk two miles.

Friday: Walk two miles. Can you do it in 35 minutes or less?

Saturday: It's Booster Day! Burn more calories. Walk three miles.

Sunday: Same as Week 1. Make it a group walk. Invite family or friends to praise His holy name!

WEEK 3

Monday: Walk one mile.

Tuesday: Walk two miles.

Wednesday: Walk one mile. Can you do it in 15 minutes?

Thursday: Walk two miles. Can you do it in 30 minutes?

Friday: No structured walks. Just remind yourself to sit less and move more.

Saturday: It's Three-Mile Saturday. Make it a brisk three miles; try for 45 minutes.

Sunday: Time for a Group Fun Walk. Don't count miles. Don't count time. Just count your blessings!

WEEK 4

By now you are really getting results, and you're on your way to building a solid, healthy habit. Rejoice that you are an active, fit person!

Monday: Walk two miles.

Tuesday: No structured walk. Love the energy that more activity brings.

Wednesday: Walk two miles.

Thursday: No structured walk. Enjoy your strong bones and muscles.

Friday: Walk two miles.

Saturday: It's Booster Saturday! Walk for one hour.

Sunday: Commit to group walks with family and friends. Extend an open invitation for others to join you each week for a power walk after a Sunday meal. Let the power of the Spirit guide your your feet!

Leslie Sansone is the founder of Studio Fitness and creator of the In-Home Walking program.