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Getting in Shape: 10,000 Steps to Terrific Health

By Thomas Ogren

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Thomas Leo Ogren

What if I could show you a completely simple, inexpensive, low risk, foolproof method to lose some weight, get healthy, and get in shape? Sound too good to be true? Well, it is true, and all it takes is a serious commitment and a \$15 step-counting pedometer.

It has been one full year now since I first strapped on a pedometer and started getting my 10,000 steps in a day. I'll be honest, at times it has been tough, but the rewards have been remarkable.

I have no idea who first started the concept of getting in 10,000 steps a day as a way to get fit, but sometime in 2003 the idea started to get considerable press. The University of Minnesota thought so much of the idea that this year (2004) they passed out free pedometers to every single staff member of the University. I first read about 10,000 steps in a newspaper and then heard about it on the radio. I looked up pedometers on Ebay and bought two step counters for five bucks each. I gave one of them to my wife who loved it but within a month had lost it. I managed to hang onto mine and it worked perfectly for 11 months before it finally stopped working. These first step counters were mechanical and needed no batteries. You just clipped them on your belt, started walking, and they counted every step you took.

I was in New York last month, to give a talk on Long Island, when my first stepper quit on me. I was one day without it and withdrawal symptoms were quickly setting in. I went to a Sportsmart and for \$14.95 bought a digital replacement, the one that I'm wearing right now. It is a Sportsline 330 brand and it doesn't count calories or miles, just steps. But that's exactly what I want it to do.

As I write this I have exactly 3,627 steps on my pedometer. This means that I have plenty of walking yet to do today, but I know that I'll do it.

I am a writer; it's what I do for a living. Last October I had just finished writing back-to-back books. I had no sooner finished writing *Safe Sex in the Garden*, for Ten Speed Press than I had to immediately dive into working on, *What the Experts May NOT Tell You About: Growing the Perfect Lawn*, for Time Warner Books. As a result of the almost constant work on those two books I spent close to a solid year

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glued to my computer. Now, computers are handy beasts, no doubt about that, but working at one is hardly what we'd call good exercise. I had gained weight, some 30+ pounds of it, and I was 56 years old, fat, and out of shape.

I finished the last book, sent it off to the publisher and bought my first pedometer. That very first day it arrived I put it on and went out and walked until I had my 10,000 steps. Quickly I found out that this took time, effort, and energy. That night my legs were a little sore but I felt really good about myself. I was doing something positive, something that might well get my big rear back in shape.

I discovered that pedometers work best if there are no clothes covering them. They have to be free to be able to register each step and need to "feel" the movement. Also, shorter people get a "better deal" with step counters. If a 6 footer and a 5 footer both walk five miles together, the shorter person may well get in all of his 10,000 steps, while the taller one may well still be a few thousand short. I'm 6' 2" tall myself, so I need to get in plenty of mileage to get my 10,000. Shorter people claim though that

they have to work harder and step faster to keep up with their long legged companions, so I suppose it all works out in the end.

Most of my life I have worked out and tried to stay in shape. I've boxed, jogged, lifted weights, done calisthenics, played tennis, hiked, done isometrics, you name it, and I did it. And all of these things worked too, to a point. But none of them worked half as well as putting on that pedometer and saying to myself, "Tom, you will get in at least 10,000 steps every single day from now on. Rain or shine, feeling great or not, busy or not, you're going to get in the 10,000 steps every single day."

I am one of those people who love to plan things out, sometimes in excess no doubt. For many years I've kept a list (100 Things I'm Going to DO Before I Die) and I take my list seriously. If I put something on my list, I'm going to do it. If I tell people I'm going to do something, I'm going to give it everything I've got and try to do it. I like to think that bottom line, each of us is only as good as his or her word. At any rate, for this past full year now I have gotten in a minimum of 10,000 steps every single day. During that time I lost almost forty pounds and got into pretty decent shape too. My resting pulse is lower; my blood pressure (which had been high) is perfect, my pant's waist size dropped from (I'm embarrassed to admit!) size 44 to size 34. A few months ago I knocked off one of the things on my list of 100. I climbed Mt Whitney, at 14,497.7 feet in elevation, the highest mountain in the contiguous United States. It was a 19-hour, extremely tough hike and without all the groundwork I'd done with that pedometer there's no way I'd have ever made it. Since climbing Whitney, I've found that every time anything I'm doing seems at all hard, I suddenly think, "Hey, you climbed Mt. Whitney!" and then whatever it is no longer seems all that hard at all.

A Dozen tips: Making your pedometer work for you:

1. Buy a simple step-counting pedometer. Don't bother with more expensive ones that count the calories and the miles. Just the steps.
2. Decide to get in your 10,000 steps a day, no exceptions, and commit to it.
3. Wear a belt and clip the pedometer on over one of your hips and it will count steps better.
4. Put your pedometer on as soon as you get up in the morning. No point in not getting "credit" for any steps you take.
5. Before you eat breakfast go out and walk around the block quickly; get in some steps right off the bat.
6. Keep checking your pedometer often through the day; have an idea all the time of how many steps you already have in and how many you still need.
7. Whenever you drive somewhere, never park close; always park far away and get in some extra

steps.

8. On long drives stop often and go for short, fast walks. At rest stops walk around the entire rest stop once or twice on each stop.

9. Try to take at least one long walk each day, one where you get in 3 to 4,000 steps.

10. No matter what, try and get in at least 7 to 8,000 steps each day before the sun goes down.

11. Don't go to bed at night unless you have your 10,000 steps. If it is 11pm and you're dog-tired and you only have 6,000 steps, well, get out that door! and start walking.

12. Every time you're standing at the sink, waiting in line, looking in the mirror, bounce up and down and pick up some extra "steps." They all count. Walk around while you're talking on the phone. Never ask someone to go get something for you while you sit there. Get up and get it yourself...more steps. Use every excuse you can to pick up extra steps.

Okay now, here's a challenge from me to you. I dare you to go get a pedometer and commit to the 10,000 steps a day. I dare you to get in as good a shape as I'm in right now. Yes, you're a busy person and this takes time. But life is short and why shouldn't we invest our time in something that will make us look better, feel better, in something that will make us stronger? Go on; go for it. I double dare you.

Tom Ogren is the author of five published books, including the revolutionary, Allergy-Free Gardening. His groundbreaking work on landscape plants and allergies has been featured on NPR, CBS Evening News, HGTV, NBC, and Fox News. Contact him through his website, www.allergyfree-gardening.com or through www.Allegra.com

Getting Bent into Shape

By Jean R. Charles

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The other day, I unfolded a Chinese food container getting it ready for the recycling bin. I noticed that flattened, it was a very interestingly shaped white piece of cardboard. It could have been used in that state for several things including, something to write on, to cover something else, or as a decoration. In order to fulfill its real purpose of being a container for food, it had to be bent into its final boxy shape.

I thought about how many times in life we come upon people or events that disturb or annoy us and we say that we get "bent out of shape" by them. Maybe these things are really meant to bend us into shape so we may fulfill our real purpose in life. Perhaps they teach us about how to cope with adversity, or show us an aspect of ourselves that we had previously ignored. They may move us out of our comfort zone so we may experience growth and change.

So next time someone or something gets you "bent out of shape," look for the lesson in the situation. Consider the possibility that you are getting closer to your really purposeful shape.

Jean coaches professionals and small business owners to discover, design and live their just right lives. Through customized coaching sessions, she provides support, focus, and momentum to keep

clients on track and progressing. She can be reached at jean@justrightcoach.com or visited on the web at www.justrightcoach.com. Subscribe to Just Right Coaching Clips newsletter by email: justrightcoaching-subscribe@topica.com



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