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**Stride for Better Health**

**By Patricia Wagner**

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Did you know that walking is one of the best activities you can do to dramatically increase your level of health?

Many people today are afflicted with "coach-potato-itis!" They come home from work, switch on their TVs and forget that their bodies need maintenance. But one day reality comes crashing through when their doctors say, "You have a problem!"

This article will show you a simple strategy for improving your health through a fun and inexpensive walking program that promises many benefits.

First, it will increase your energy level. Since walking is an aerobic exercise, it helps the heart and lungs become more efficient.

Both PCOPF (the President's Council on Physical Fitness) and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disease (NIDDK) state that a regular walking program can lower resting heart rates and blood pressure. It can help burn excess calories and increase muscle tone too.

Second, walking can enhance your mental health. Taking regular walks can help reduce stress and enable you to sleep better. It can also help relieve symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. When you walk, your body produces endorphins which produce a feeling of wellbeing.

Third, it's fun! The President's Council on Physical Fitness (PCOPF) calls walking the most popular form of exercise. It can be very enjoyable taking walks with a friend or loved one or even in groups. My husband and I often take walks at night and discuss our day. It's a special time for me.

Here's what you'll need as you begin your new walk-for-health lifestyle. Purchase a pair of comfortable shoes, sunscreen or a hat and sunglasses. Choose loose-fitting garments. Bring along a bottle of

water on warm days.

But before you briskly stride out the door to begin your new adventure, you'd better check with your doctor first if you experience any of these symptoms: persistent dizziness chronic shortness of breath high blood pressure heart problems chest pain

When you're ready to begin walking regularly, there are some precautions to take. Walk during daylight hours or at night only in well-lit areas. Be sure to obey all traffic rules for pedestrians. If you decide to wear headphones, make sure you can still hear what's going on around you – like cars honking. Stop and rest if you start feeling sick to your stomach, dizzy or experience unusual pain.

Try to walk whenever possible as part of your daily activities. For example, park a distance from stores so you can get some extra exercise going to and from your destination. Why not visit local parks to enjoy the beauty of nature while you're exercising? Check out the neighborhood where you

live to find good routes. On rainy days you can walk in malls instead of doing without your exercise time. It's a good idea to make a habit of selecting stairs instead of elevators when you need to spend time in office buildings. It's more fun if you have a companion. This is good exercise for dogs too – they love to go for walks!

Experts recommend thirty minutes of brisk striding per day. It's best to walk every day, but you only really need to walk five days a week. This can be broken down into smaller segments of time – three ten-minute walks instead of one long 30-minute one.

Try to stride as fast as you can without overexerting yourself. You can tell when you are going at a brisk pace because your heart will beat faster and you'll breathe deeper. However, your heart should not be racing and you should still be able to carry on a conversation.

So get off the couch, put those chips down, slip on your comfortable shoes and start striding your way to better health!

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Patricia Wagner offers informative tips on living a more energetic lifestyle at

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## **Training Technique**

**By Matt Russ**

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Having an effective training plan is very important, but if you are reinforcing bad habits or technique with your training you are working against yourself. Technique, form, and skill are often overlooked facets of training. Athletes should spend a portion of each season perfecting their form, just as they work on strength, endurance, and speed.

Proper technique not only makes you more efficient and faster, it can prevent overuse injuries. Endurance athletes repeat motions thousands of times in a single work out. Improper leg tracking on your bike or a bad foot strike at best wastes energy, but could lead to a visit with the orthopedist. Here are some guidelines for perfecting your form and technique...

- Seek instruction. You can not work on better form if you do not know what it is. A cycling or running coach can video your stride or spin and give you exact feedback on what you need to work on. Books and video tapes are helpful, but they do not have a discerning eye and can not give you the specific instruction you may need. Most coaches charge an hourly fee for one to one instruction.
- Get Feedback. Visual feedback is the best. If you own a video camera set it up on a tri-pod to record your form. Playing it back in slow motion allows you to break down each portion of your stride or spin. A mirror in front of the treadmill or trainer is another inexpensive way to give your self feedback.
- Conscious then unconscious. The process of reinforcing proper form is to consciously repeat a proper motion until it becomes automatic and unconscious. This process takes thousands of repetitions, and you must regularly focus on and check your technique and form.
- Work on only 2–3 aspects of technique per session. If you try to adjust too many things at once it is difficult to focus on performing them all correctly. Take just a few aspects of your stride, stroke, or spin and work on perfecting them.
- Slow then fast. Take a motion or even part of a motion and perform it very slowly and correctly. Gradually bring up the speed of the motion until you are at your race pace. If at any point you perform it incorrectly, slow down again and repeat until you have it.
- Work in base. As intensity increases it becomes harder to concentrate on form. If proper form is not unconscious at this point, it will be much harder to learn. The long slow base work outs are great for

working on form. This is not to say you should only work on technique in base. You should work on technique and use drills year round. Base is simply the best time to perfect your form so that you carry good technique into the season, and it adds variety to your base work outs.

·Get the right equipment. If you are running in the wrong shoe for your stride mechanics, or you are improperly fit on your bike, it will make it more difficult to have good form. Make sure you have the right equipment and that it is adjusted correctly.

Learning and using proper technique is "free speed." Often you can lower your energy usage and increase your speed without greater exertion. In fact, your exertion level may go down and your speed or power up. Proper technique is no less applicable to an amateur athlete than it is to a pro. In fact, amateurs can usually benefit the most from technique instruction.

Matt Russ has coached and trained athletes around the country and internationally. He currently holds licenses by USAT, USATF, and is an Expert level USAC coach. Matt has coached athletes for CTS (Carmichael Training Systems), is an Ultrafit Associate. Visit [www.thesportfactory.com](http://www.thesportfactory.com) for more information.

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