

## Put the SPRING in your step!

by *Sandra J. Hartley, MPE, EdD*

**M**any older Canadians are anxious to get winter over with NOW. We want to get out, be in the fresh air, and feel the sun's rays. With longer days, warmer temperatures, and dryer ground on the way, you can take your first steps to a fun and fit summer.

Walking is a great way to get back into an active lifestyle. The scientific evidence just keeps flooding in -- sitting for long periods of time is a dangerous thing to do. It doubles disease risk in the same way as chain smoking or being obese does.

To get the most out of walking, follow these three simple rules:

1. Show up!
2. Plan your distance.
3. Slowly build your stamina.

### 1. Show up!

It's ideal to go with a friend, spouse, neighbour, or your family dog. That way, you make a commitment to "show up," even if you don't feel like doing some exercise. Most of the time you will overcome your fatigue and do better than you expected. But if you don't show up in the spring, you may not show up at all! Now is the time to line up your walking buddy, plan your walks, and enjoy each other's company. If you haven't found a walking buddy, think about it as 'taking your heart for a walk'.

### 2. Plan your distance

People do not always agree on the distance, the pace, or the time of day to walk. You and your walking buddy should have a plan that you are both comfortable with. Your first few walks should be simple and easy. If you go too hard too soon, you will get too tired and sore to want to go next time.

According to Health Canada, even 10 minutes of walking counts toward wellness. If you are mobile



and healthy, go for 5 minutes one way, rest or stretch a bit, and then come back for a final 5 minutes. Next time add another minute. Build up gradually. Once you feel confident about your pace, you and your buddy can try for a longer walk to a fun destination. Or, you can plan a hike on a community trail.

### 3. Slowly build your stamina

Once you are walking several times a week for 30 minutes or more, there are many ways to 'load' your body so that your aerobic processes (such as breathing and heart rate) are challenged. Here are some examples:

- Walk up hills.
- Carry hand weights (1-2 lbs or about ½ - 1 kilo)
- Carry a backpack with a heavy book in it
- Add 'spring' to your step. This means, for a short time at least, roll from your heel right up to your toe on each step. Or march with

your knees high. Or hop, or skip! Yes, this is a very vigorous way to get your heart rate up. Pick a telephone pole about 100 feet away, and try to hop or skip the distance.

May you have SPRING in your step this year and show the world you are young at heart!

#### About the Author

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