



Pedometers: Do They Make a Difference?

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With all the various types of exercise equipment you could buy, is the inexpensive pedometer really likely to affect your activity level and health? As with any piece of equipment, the answer seems to depend on how you use it. A large number of studies show that pedometers can bring a variety of benefits.

It's been said that if we could bottle exercise, we'd have a medicine that could treat the majority of today's health problems. The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) recommends at least an hour of moderate activity daily as part of a healthy lifestyle to lower cancer risk. Less than a quarter of American adults come even close.

Pedometers are small electronic devices you can clip to a belt or waistband to measure how many steps you take. Studies support their accuracy, although calculations of distance and especially calorie-burning may be imprecise.

Health experts often recommend a goal of 10,000 steps a day. In a recent study, 400 women were given pedometers and this goal. After eight weeks, women reported increased energy, less frequent illness and weight loss. An earlier study of over 200 sedentary adults showed that wearing pedometers encouraged people to be more active. Their body fat decreased and their fitness and blood pressure improved, as effectively as if they had structured exercise.

Another recent study involved senior adults with osteoarthritis of the knees that significantly interfered with their daily life. All participated in an arthritis self-

management class. Some were also given pedometers and a goal of increasing their daily steps by 30 percent. After 12 weeks, the pedometer group had increased their steps by 23 percent, while the other group was walking less than when they started. The pedometer group also showed improved walking and greater leg strength.

Regular walking has long been known to reduce high blood pressure. Several studies have reported drops of six to ten points in blood pressure among those who use pedometers and walk more. The blood pressure drops seem to be a direct result of walking and unrelated to weight.

How pedometers are used may create these positive benefits. One study divided women into two groups. Everyone wore a pedometer daily, but only one group kept a daily record of their steps. After 12 weeks, the record-keeping group was logging about 2,000 steps more than the other group. That's equivalent to an extra mile a day. Maybe the increased awareness from keeping a record is the key. A more recent study found that those with best results from an eight-week program aiming for 10,000 steps daily were those who set daily goals and kept a log.

You might be able to obtain the same benefits without a pedometer by keeping a log of the time or distance you walk each day. You could aim for the AICR-recommended 60 minutes daily, or start by adding 30 percent to your usual walking time. The advantage of a pedometer is that it can catch small increases in activity, like walking up stairs instead of taking elevators. Many people who increase activity while wearing pedometers seem to do so through these small bits of walking that would probably escape anyone's attention. But a pedometer records them.

If you need help to prevent weight gain and improve your eating habits, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*[™] can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information.