

healthy MOVES

Walk This Way

The best exercise might be the simplest: walking

By Matt McMillen for *Lupus Now* magazine (Dec. 2013)

Cindy Coney goes for a walk every morning. Some days, she can only make it around the block. Other days, she travels five miles through her Tampa, FL, neighborhood. But no matter how far she gets, she always makes the effort.

“Moving really helps my joint pain,” says Coney, 58, a consultant and speaker who was diagnosed with lupus in 1980.

Indeed, walking builds joint strength, and it helps shed pounds so that joints carry a lighter load. And it’s ideal for people at all fitness levels, especially beginners.

“Walking is the most natural activity,” says physical therapist Ashraf Abdelhamid, P.T., D.P.T., M.S., O.C.S., who works with people with lupus at the Achieve Orthopedic Rehabilitation Institute in Chicago. “You won’t feel you are doing anything overly stressful, and it’s a great way to use your stores of energy.”

Before you begin a regular walking routine, see your physical therapist or regular physician. Together, you can determine how far and how fast your first walks should be. A brisk 15 minutes on level ground is a starting point for many people, but less than that may be right if you haven’t been active lately. Your goal, says Abdelhamid, is very gradually to build up to 45–50 minutes of walking most days. And remember: You can always break that down into several shorter walks.

If you experience a flare, don’t let it bench you completely. “Try to keep walking, but go more slowly,” says Abdelhamid. “If slowing down doesn’t help, give yourself two to three days off and then walk again.”

The keys to success: Wear a good pair of walking shoes, consider a pedometer to track your progress, be consistent, and make it fun. Also important: Stay hydrated and be sun-safe!

Coney recommends picking a time and place you know you’ll enjoy—and consider inviting someone to join you. “When I walk with a friend, our mouths often get the most exercise,” she jokes.

Safety Tips

- Choose wisely when selecting which surface to walk on.
- Treadmills—be careful getting on and off.
- Sidewalks—watch out for cracks and occasional uneven surfaces.
- Hills build endurance, but there’s extra effort required.
- Open area shopping centers—go before or after the crowds.
- Outdoor tracks with soft, rubbery surfaces—avoid cinder tracks, which are unstable.