

10 Minutes to Better Health

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Fix land-use regulation to make walking functional and delightful. See sections 26 through 31 on the [Woodmont Triangle](http://www.VirtualAdjacency.com) page of www.VirtualAdjacency.com

You don't need to log long hours at the gym to reap the many benefits of exercise. A recent study shows that as little as 70 minutes a week (that's just 10 minutes a day!) can reduce your risk of major disease and greatly improve your quality of life. "Our bodies respond very positively to even small amounts of physical activity," explains **Dr. Tim Church** of the **Pennington Research Center** in Baton Rouge, La. "For sedentary individuals, the immediate health benefits are huge. In fact, those who have been doing nothing stand to benefit the most from increasing physical activity in terms of dying prematurely."

While the standard recommendation—that people aim for 150 minutes of exercise a week—hasn't changed, recent studies prove that results are evident in far less time. "We saw a change in waist size, which is associated with the most dangerous form of abdominal fat, in just 70 minutes of moderate exercise, such as walking on a treadmill or riding a stationary bike," Dr. Church says of the study.

One of the biggest pitfalls on the road to fitness is the all-or-nothing thinking (if I can't run a marathon, why bother?) that has too many of us giving up before we even begin. But anything you do is better than nothing.

For example, even short bouts of exercise can affect how your body metabolizes blood sugar for up to 72 hours. This is particularly important for those with diabetes or other chronic conditions as well as for the elderly.

We tend to underestimate the positive effect of less-intense exercise because we mistakenly equate weight with fitness and quickly despair if the scale doesn't budge. "We need to reshape our thinking on this," Dr. Church suggests. "Walking a few minutes a day may not cause your weight to drop substantially, but it will reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, diabetes, and many other conditions." Small lifestyle changes are also easier to stick with, providing lasting benefits.

One of the best ways to get started is to buy an inexpensive pedometer. Most Americans take approximately 5000 steps a day. Increasing that to 7000 or 8000 will further reduce the risk of disease. Figure out how many steps you take a day and then aim to add 1000 steps a week. Gradually add more until you reach your goal. For many people, that means making just a few easy changes—walking to the store, going to the zoo on weekends with your kids instead of to a movie, or taking a stroll after dinner. And the psychological benefits can be as profound as the physical ones. "It always amazes people to see how little activity it takes to feel better," Dr. Church says.