

Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

March 2010 Newsletter

Saunter, Stroll, or Stride in Spring 2010

By Sarah Peskoe, BA

The daffodils have bloomed. The weather is warm. The sky is blue, and springtime is officially here. Physical activity cannot be stressed enough as a component of healthy living, and today is the perfect day to take extra steps outside. Participating in moderate physical activity on most days of the week can aid in achieving a healthy body weight and psychological well-being (USDHHS & USDA, 2005).

Make small steps. Don't expect to walk a mile on your first day. Aim for improvement, not perfection. Many people are disappointed if they cannot accomplish their goal immediately, but even a marathon begins with a single step. Find an activity that you enjoy, and get involved. People are individuals, and what works for one person may not appeal to another. You will continue to engage in physical activity that you like, so try something new or return

to an activity that you enjoyed in the past.

You don't need fancy equipment. Exercising is commonly associated with going to an expensive gym with all the latest workout equipment, but incorporating physical activity is as easy as putting on a comfortable pair of walking shoes and strolling around the block after breakfast. Physical activity can simply be taking more steps than usual. Perhaps it is parking at the end of the parking lot and taking the extra steps to the store entrance. Physical activity is also walking around the block before picking up the daily mail and taking the stairs when you usually opt for the elevator. Physical activity can be using the track at the local high school after track practices. Be creative, and do not limit your physical activity to the gym.

Incorporate it into your routine. Just as we brush our teeth every night

and watch our favorite television shows each weekday, physical activity can be included in a routine. The small steps are difficult at first, but by sticking with it, it eventually becomes a part of our weekly routine. Those thirty minutes three times a week will become a regular practice. When we write it on the calendar or add it to the to-do list, physical activity becomes a habit. If you miss a day, do not beat yourself up about it or give up altogether. Just start fresh the next morning, and get right back on track.

Make it a social event. Call a friend and walk at your local park or through a pretty neighborhood. Rather than talking on the phone, you can see them face-to-face. Physical activity can double as personal time, where you can interact and chit-chat about any new developments in each other's lives. By promising another person that you will be present, you also feel obligated to keep that date and less likely to put it off or change your mind at the last minute. Friends keep you accountable, and you are doing something healthy not only for yourself— but for each other.

Stay hydrated. Drink fluids regularly during the day, and drink several glasses of water to rehydrate after physical activity. The warm Georgia weather can cause us to dehydrate quickly, so be extra careful to consume plenty of fluids.

You are a role model. You are being watched by your grandchildren. Kids are sponges that absorb so much of what we say and do. With childhood obesity on the rise, it is more important than ever to set a good example for today's children. Be a role model for your grandchild, and engage in physical activity.

The recommendation for older adults by the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans is to participate in regular physical activity to reduce functional declines associated with aging and to achieve other benefits (USDHHS & USDA, 2005). So whether you saunter, stroll, or stride, get outside this spring.

For more information, please go to the CDC website: Physical Activity and Health: Older Adults, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/olderad.htm>.