

## Lifestyles and Balance



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## Get up and get moving with Mon Moves

### Health initiative to encourage residents to walk

By Stephanie Bock

WVU Hospitals

Spring is just around the corner, so if you've delayed that New Year's resolution to start exercising, it's time!

Before you join a gym, or buy an exercise tape or fancy equipment, consider starting a walking program. Encouraging people to walk is the goal of "Mon Moves," a community effort to address obesity and sedentary lifestyles among residents of Monongalia County and the surrounding region.

The planning phase of the initiative got under way last fall and involved individuals from all facets of the community. The second phase -- to kick off in March 2005 -- will be an eight-week media campaign that uses advertising strategies to motivate local residents to walk 30 minutes each day. Bill Reger-Nash, of the WVU Department of Community Medicine, is spearheading the effort. Reger-Nash has organized similar projects in Wheeling and, most recently, in McDowell County and Binghamton, N.Y. He has received national recognition for his efforts and was recently featured in an article in *U.S. News & World Report*.

"People are becoming more sedentary, and as a global population, we are becoming heavier," says Reger-Nash. "This is a public health catastrophe throughout the United States, as well as here in West Virginia."

West Virginia has the second-highest rate of death due to heart disease, the sixth-highest rate of death due to all cancers, and the third-highest rate of death due to diabetes. Reger-Nash says that these statistics can partly be attributed to many West Virginians being sedentary and overweight.

"In 2001, 32 percent of the state's population reported no leisure-time activity," says Reger-Nash. "That means about one-third of adult West Virginians are not exercising. This is an epidemic -- one that's not just impacting the health of adult men and women, but one that's affecting our children. Children learn by example. They need to understand that exercise isn't a choice -- it's a way of life. Exercise and good nutrition are keys to fighting the state's growing childhood obesity problem."

The Mon Moves media campaign will try to sell "walking" with the same level of intensity and sophistication that McDonald's uses to sell hamburgers.

"We'll saturate the airways with positive messages about the benefits of walking," he says. "People need to stop making excuses and find the time to walk. Our bodies were designed to move. When we sit too much, we tend to become tired, stressed and overweight."

In addition to the media messages, there will be community programs and events, a Web site and much more. While the campaign won't officially start for another year, Reger-Nash offers the following tips for getting started in a walking program:

- \* Get your doctor's approval before beginning any type of exercise program if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, other risk factors, or are over age 50 and have been inactive.
- \* Wear layered clothing so that you can remove layers as you warm up.
- \* Wear walking shoes with good arch support, a firm heel counter and some type of shock-absorbing material.
- \* Start slow -- walk at a comfortable pace.
- \* Drink four to eight ounces of water for every 20 minutes of walking.
- \* Walk with a friend at least a couple of times each week.
- \* Cool down with five minutes of stretching exercises.

Reger-Nash recommends walking 30 minutes every day of the week to achieve optimal results. He does, however, encourage those just getting started to walk 10 minutes and to build up to 30.

"The easiest way to get started is to incorporate 10 minutes into your daily routine," Reger-Nash explains. "Take 10 minutes to walk your dog, take a brief stroll at lunch, or park your car five or six blocks from your morning destination."

He adds that some studies have found that there may be just as much benefit from three 10-minute walks as from one 30-minute walk.

Walking, as well as other forms of physical activity, can relieve stress, anxiety and depression, and elevate mood. It can also reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and several forms of cancer.

The effect that exercise can have on your health is almost immediate. So, whether you walk on the rail-trail, on a treadmill, at the mall or around your neighborhood, get up and get moving! You'll look great, feel great and improve your overall health.

**STEPHANIE BOCK** is director of community relations at WVU Hospitals. This is one in a series of columns provided by Mon Health System and WVU Hospitals.

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