

# It's All about Taking Steps

Throughout our lives many good things have been associated with walking...

- Walking across the stage to receive our diploma
- Walking down the aisle at our wedding
- Watching our children take their first steps
- Walking to raise money to support many good causes
- Taking a walk holding hands with someone you love
- Being known as someone who “walks the talk”

As we age walking is still critically important to maintaining our health, stamina, flexibility, and mobility. Is it easy and simple to do, requires no special talent or skills, doesn't cost anything other than purchasing a good pair of properly fitting walking shoes, and it can be done inside or outside on a time schedule of your choice. Maybe because walking is one of the cheapest, easiest and most convenient ways to improve our overall health we don't recognize its great value.

Based on several research studies by many professional organizations and universities, walking on a regular basis (at least 30 minutes five days a week) can make you feel better plus offer multiple positive attributes including:

## PHYSICAL BENEFITS

- Heart/Blood: lowers blood pressure (hypertension); decreases your risk of heart attack; reduces your risk of dying from heart disease or stroke; reduces low-density (LDL) or “bad” cholesterol in the blood which can cause plaque buildup along artery walls
- Bones/Muscles: helps control joint swelling and pain from arthritis; protects against falling and bone fractures in older adults; strengthens muscles and joints; diminishes the risk of hip fractures
- Weight: helps you burn both fat and calories thereby contributing to better weight control
- Prevents Diseases: studies have shown walking protects against breast and colon cancers; helps prevent type 2 diabetes; reduces the risk of developing glaucoma

## EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

- Mood: elevates overall sense of well-being and your self-esteem; reduces anxiety and likelihood of severe depression; regular walking gives you a sense of achievement, boosts your energy and your spirits
- Stress: walking helps you sleep better; gives you the opportunity to socialize with friends or acquaintances with whom you can share your concerns as well as celebrate the good things happening

- Brain: The National Council on Aging found that the thinking/cognitive skills of those over 60 increased with regular walking; cognitive functions further improve when walking is done in a variety of settings and with a variety of people

To maximize the benefits of walking some fitness experts are now recommending we learn the principles of “ChiWalking”. Some of the basics of T’ai Chi which emphasize improving balance, strength and cognition are part of ChiWalking. By learning good walking form you will have less negative impact on your joints, feet, back, knees and hips.

According to the website [ChiWalking.com](http://ChiWalking.com) you can learn (and then mix and match) different types of ChiWalks depending on your goals, including a Cardio Walk, an Aerobic Walk, a Flexibility Walk, a Loosening Walk, a Focusing Walk, and Energizing Walk, a Walking Meditation, and more. These walks focus on the body-mind component inherent by incorporating what the people at this site call the *Five Mindful Steps*.

1. Get Aligned: physically with your posture, mentally with your intentions
2. Engage your core: physically with your lower abdominal muscles, mentally by using your will power
3. Create Balance: physically between your upper and lower body and also between the right side and the left side of your body, mentally by creating a balanced fitness program
4. Make a Choice: physically to walk in a new way, mentally to create health
5. Move Forward: physically with grace and ease, mentally by focusing your mind on the next mindful step

These five steps take you through an entire health and fitness program that will energize you and have you looking forward to each walk.

How is ChiWalking different from regular walking? Most of us walk primarily by just using the muscles in our legs and as we put one leg ahead of the other we pull our bodies forward with our leg muscles. Correct ChiWalking has you using primarily your core muscles in the center/trunk of your body while tilting your posture slightly forward. You lead with your upper body and this forward movement also utilizes your arms, posture and body alignment for forward motion. ChiWalking is also based on the T’ai Chi movement principles which require that all your movements should be balanced in six directions: front to back, left side to right side, and head to toe (top to bottom).

Would you like to learn more about ChiWalking? The third Tuesday of the month the Delta College 50+...*Just Like Gold Program* has a “Bits and Bites” program (a bite to eat first followed by a bit of information about a subject that is of interest to those of us 50+ in age). The Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> meeting will be about ChiWalking. You are invited to join us but please call in advance as reservations are necessary and there is a small charge for food. If you become a member of the Delta College 50+...*Just Like Gold Program* you will pay reduced fees for the monthly meeting as well as all other programs.

Walking is just one example of what you can do to develop and maintain your health. If you are interested in health and wellness please plan to attend the 50+ Health for Life Expo that will be

held on the main campus of Delta College Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. The major sponsors will be Delta College and our four regional hospitals, Bay Regional Medical Center, Covenant HealthCare, Mid-Michigan Health, and St. Mary's of Michigan. This free event will have many exhibitors, learning sessions by health care professionals, demonstrations, interactive activities and product vendors. You are invited to learn how to improve your health!

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