

Walk to Stay Healthy and Creative



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From time immemorial, human beings have been walking. Unlike trees, animals and humans are given the ability by God the Almighty to move around with their legs. In the case of human beings, they walk for a wide range of reasons to fulfil their human needs. In the olden days, long before the advancement in the field of medicine, people walked a lot and never thought it was a form of exercise to stay healthy.

As modernisation ushered in, it provided comforts to our lives. Modern means of moving around pampered us too much, to the extent that one section of humanity became indolent and never wanted to walk even to accomplish simple tasks like: climbing a staircase or walking to a nearby cafe or a grocery market. The Apps for

everything on the smartphone give them the feeling that the whole world is in service to them. Since everything can be delivered to their doorways, they feel they don't have to move around and feel exhausted and sweaty.

Quite the opposite of the indolent ones mentioned above, even with modern comforts, the other segment of humanity still preferred to walk short distances to accomplish simple tasks in daily life. For them, walking re-energizes their bodies, and meeting neighbours and other people brings joy to their hearts.

Even today, in many dry regions of the world, people walk many miles in search of food and water. In such an environment, it is a necessity to walk and find nourishment for their bodies. Without doing so, the risk of dying is very high. Contrastively, in the affluent countries of the world, people need to walk as an exercise to burn the excessive calories in their bodies. Failure to do so will result in health issues that can be fatal.

Health Benefits of Walking

The latest research in medicine to a large extent has brought awareness to a large segment of people in the world, regardless one lives in a poor or rich country. Medical practitioners believe that people need to walk an average of thirty minutes daily. Doing so will solve many of their health problems listed below:

1. Unwanted fats in the body can be reduced,
2. Prevents cardiovascular diseases,
3. Overcomes muscular pain or stiffness,
4. Better management of hypertension, cholesterol and diabetes, etc.

Psychological Rewards

Going for regular walks can reward us socially and psychologically in many ways. After working for long hours either at home or at the workplace, our bodies accumulate a lot of stress. By going for a walk, we can reduce it and bring our bodies to a state of homeostasis. The definition given by the National Cancer Institute of USA for homeostasis is, "A state of balance among all the body systems needed for the body to survive and function correctly. In homeostasis, body levels of acid, blood pressure, blood sugar, electrolytes, energy, hormones, oxygen, proteins, and temperature are constantly adjusted to respond to changes inside and outside the body, to keep them at a normal level."

As stress toxifies the body, a brief walk after work can detoxify it. Besides the brief walk, a gentle walk can bring cheers to our hearts when we meet people during the time we are in the act of walking. The change of mood as a result of a relaxed conversation with someone brings positive chemical changes in our bodies. Even if we fail to connect with any human being, the chirping of a bird, the spectacular colours of the rainbow, the serene beauty of the twilight sky, or the gentle touch of zephyr on our bodies can make us forget our worries and bring a renewed hope to face the challenges of life.

The Effects of a Brisk and Slow Walks

According to medical doctors, there is a difference between a brisk walk and a slow walk. The former helps to burn calories faster, improves breathing, increases stamina, improves metabolism, reduces body weight, etc. While the latter works well at the psychological level. A slow walk is a soul-enriching thing. It relaxes the human mind, changes the mood of an individual and creates harmony in the human soul. The last thing that can happen to an individual is that, as a result of the new connections made among the brain cells, one can experience the birth of new and creative ideas in the brain.

Walk Your Way into Your Own Creative Mind

Reading biographies of great personalities in history has indicated that many such people enjoyed walking in their lives. Many influential people like philosophers, literary men, scientists, music composers, artists and others have found inspiration while taking a walk. In the following paragraphs, we would like to share the personal experiences of some famous people when they go for a walk.

The famous English writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) in her essay, 'The StreetHunting' states that she got the inspiration for her writings when she walked around the streets of London. Looking at the idiosyncrasies of people and letting her mind wander brought new ideas to her.

William Blake (1757-1827) the English poet, painter, and printmaker, walked as a means to leave the chaos in the external world to get into the subconscious mind for new inspiration. Another Britisher by the name of William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was an avid walker. He is famously known as a person who walked 175,000 miles during his lifetime to get into the creative region of his mind. Many times, he wrote the beautiful lines of his poems in his mind before he put them down on the paper.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was an American essayist, philosopher, poet and naturalist. His personal experience was that, whenever he went for a walk and his legs started to move, he experienced the flow of ideas from his brain.

Henry Valentine Miller (1891-1980) who was a famous novelist, short story writer and essayist, shared how walking stimulated his mind to come up with creative ideas by saying “Most writing is done away from the typewriter, away from the desk. I’d say it occurs in the quiet, silent moments, while you’re walking or shaving or playing a game or whatever.”

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) who is well-known for his 10 hours of nightly sleep was also a passionate walker. Many believed that the combination of the two in a way might have contributed to his state of being one of the most brilliant minds of the world.

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827) admitted that walking greatly fueled his musical creativity. As he walked, he felt an immense love for nature. Going for a long walk in nature was an escapism from the complexity of his daily routine. Finally, he admitted that walking is a form of therapy for his body and soul.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) the famous German philosopher had the habit of going on long walks with a notebook and a pen to scribble. As he walked alone in the wilderness and as ideas started to trickle down from his mind, he captured them by writing in his notebook. It is said that he used to walk for close to eight hours a day. His work ‘The Wanderer and His Shadow’ was written entirely during the time he was performing his daily walks. One of his famous quotes on walking is ‘All truly great thoughts are conceived while walking.’

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), as one of the Enlightenment thinkers, preferred to walk around to see a city entirely. To him, walking provides the opportunity to see the many details and events that are happening in a city. In his famous book entitled Emile, he wrote, “To travel on foot is to travel in the fashion of Thales, Plato, and Pythagoras. I find it hard to understand how a philosopher can bring himself to travel in any other way; how he can tear himself from the study of the wealth which lies before his eyes and beneath his feet.” In a teasing manner, he characterized those who preferred to ride in well-padded carriages in most instances as looking gloomy, complaining about life, or sick. While the poor of his time who walked for almost everything, looked always cheerful, relaxed and accepting of everything happening in their lives.

The Peripatetic Philosophers

In ancient Greece, after the dominant eras of Socrates (470-399BC) and Plato(428-348BC), came Aristotle (384-322BC) as the third giant of philosophy. As the founder of the school of philosophy known as Realism, Aristotle established a teaching and learning institute called the Lyceum. At this teaching institute, Aristotle introduced a new method of lecturing. Unlike the academia established by Plato, at the Lyceum, the lectures were delivered by Aristotle and other philosophers who came after his time like Theophrastus (371-287BC), Phaenias of Eresus (who came to Athens in 332BC), Eudemus of Rhodes (370-300BC), Aristoxenus (375-335BC), and Dicaearchus (370-323BC) by walking around the lecture theatre. The students will tag along behind the tutor while receiving the content of the subject matter delivered to them. The walking takes place from one pillar to the other of the Lyceum. The walking stops for a while at a crucial point of the lecture for a question and answer session. After that, the walking continues. This process continues until the lecture comes to an end. This method is well-known as the Peripatetic Method.

Walking and Brain Activity

Since a network of nerves runs all over the human body, there is a special link between the feet and the mind. According to neuroscientists, there are about 100 billion cells in the adult human brain. Walking in a way contributes to new connections made among the brain cells. Many of our readings in knowledge, information, and life experiences are recorded and restored in the brain cells in a fragmented manner. Our daily activity of walking creates a sensation in the mind. As a result, the brain cells start to communicate and connect with one another. The term used by neuroscientists to explain this connection is called the synapse.

When the fragmented ideas in the brain connect and merge, they give birth to new, innovative and creative ideas. In many ways, a slow walk helps the brain to generate new ideas.

Latest Research on Creativity

In recent times, studies have shown that going for a slow walk opens up new avenues for creative ideas to flow. Such studies suggest that we have to walk or move around to be inspired. In another situation, research was conducted to measure the level of creativity of those who walked compared to those who were confined to their seats for a long time. The result indicated that those who went for a walk increased their level of creativity by 60% compared to those who sat all day long.

Safety Is Our Priority

In realizing the benefits of going for a walk, we should not simply venture into unknown territories like virgin jungles and mountainous regions of the world. Perhaps the good idea of going for a jungle walk will be in a group. For long walks, we should explore the terrain of the jungle, hill or mountain carefully before we go about with our expedition. In all types of walks either short or long distances, we have to be vigilant on the dangers that may lurk on our pathways, and never be neglectful of the safety measures.

Postgraduate Students and Academics

The right candidates who should test and verify the relationship between the feet and brain connection should be those who are doing their postgraduate studies and academics who are busy with research work. From our personal experience in the past as researchers at the postgraduate level and now as academics, we feel there is an element of truth in what has been expressed by authors, philosophers, musicians, scientists and others on the benefits of going for a walk when deeply involved in all forms of writing, data analysis and creative work.

In realizing the bodily, psychological and spiritual benefits of walking, we should encourage ourselves, family members, clients who come for counselling, retired and old people, students and others to include walking in their daily routine. By doing so, we will all look cheerful and energized in embracing the many challenges of life.

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