

Here's Your #1 Health Tip

If you must choose one healthy behavior, start walking — and then tell a buddy!

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT THING you can do for your health today? Michael Roizen, MD, Chief Wellness Officer and Chairman of Cleveland Clinic's Wellness Institute, says "It's something that virtually everyone can do. Walk 30 minutes and then call a buddy."

The health benefits of walking are astonishing. "Walking turns on genes that decrease your risk of cancers, lower your blood pressure and lousy cholesterol and decrease insulin resistance. Over the long term, walking also decreases the risk and pain of osteoarthritis," says Dr. Roizen.

Walking boosts your immune system, and increases healthy cholesterol and the chance your arteries and organs, including your skin, will look and function like they did when you were younger. Walking also improves memory function, bone and muscle strength and balance. Best of all, walking is free.

"I can't think of many things in your body that walking doesn't improve, and virtually everyone reading this can do it," he says. "Plus, calling a buddy during or after a walk keeps you walking. Together, walking and talking can make you up to eight years younger."

Walking is especially beneficial if you're feeling blue. Walking encourages your brain to release endorphins, the body's natural opiates, which can make you feel better right away. It also gets the brain to exude serotonin, another potent mood elevator.

What's the best way to walk? Simply put on a pair of sneakers, step outside and start walking. Dr. Roizen advises taking a walk around the block, a spin around the office parking lot during lunch, a no-dawdling loop through the grocery store on the way home and another walk around the block after dinner.

"Taking 10 minutes longer to get home to your family or to be away from your desk isn't selfish," he says. "Taking care of yourself is a way of showing love for the people who care about you."

Next issue: Learn how the buddy system can help you make a YOU-turn if you've gotten off track.

Dr. Michael Roizen nudges healthier behaviors on many television shows including Oprah, Good Morning America, PBS fundraisers, and 20/20. His bestselling RealAge and You series of books are available wherever books are sold. Take the RealAge quiz by visiting realage.com, and discover what your "real" age is versus your calendar age.

Walking: By the Numbers

Interested in weight loss? You can easily burn 250 calories by walking briskly (as if you were late for an appointment) for 60 minutes a day. If you cut 250 calories a day from your diet, too, you'll lose a pound a week.

Can't devote a solid 30 minutes to walking? Split your routine into two 15-minute sessions or three 10-minute sessions. Walk at lunch and again after work. Or walk in the morning, at lunch and again in the evening.

Consult your doctor before beginning any exercise program, and happy trails!

Optimize your steps! Keep track of daily steps with a pedometer and listen to music or talk with a friend while you walk. You'll more likely walk the recommended 10,000 steps a day!

