

The Walk Kansas season is in full swing. With a later start date this year, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, there should be little opportunity to use cold weather as an excuse not get my walking time in, right?

In its' 15<sup>th</sup> year, Walk Kansas is once more being sponsored by K-State Research and Extension. This team-based program is designed to promote healthy food choices, physical activity and exercise. Even if you didn't sign up a team, you can still make it an intentional decision to become more physically active and help your body cope with the demands of daily life. Our bodies carry much the stress from daily decisions and the schedule we keep in our muscles and in our minds. Physical activity can keep those muscles toned and keep our mind clearer to tackle those challenges.

Physicians say that if walking were a pill, it would be the most widely prescribed medication. The reason we promote walking is that almost anyone can do it and it is good for your heart.

Physical activity versus exercise — there is a difference. Physical activity is anything that gets a person moving, such as walking to the mailbox. Exercise is moving at a pace that increases your heart rate, such as walking around the block.

It is important to move throughout your day, and especially important that you move — at least stand — for several minutes every waking hour. Even if you have a sedentary job where you are not moving much more than your fingers over a keyboard or bending over a desk, there are things you can do to be physically active while you remain seated.

Most of us get too little physical activity. We spend more than half of our waking day being physically stagnant. This affects our health in negative ways and can lead to chronic illnesses such as obesity or heart disease to name only two! Inactivity can lead to premature death. Research shows that those who work in offices spend 65 – 75 percent of the workday sitting. Even for those who exercise regularly, sitting too long can increase health risks. People who work in offices are prone to neck, shoulder and back tension. Poor posture can contribute to those aches and pains, as well. Prolonged periods of “chair time” can cause tight leg muscles, especially in the hamstrings, and stiff joints. Taking breaks throughout the day to reduce long periods of “chair time” is important to good health as well and help boost your productivity at work.

So what can you do to change the impact your “chair time” has on your body? The Family and Consumer Sciences department with the University of Arkansas Research and Extension has created an entire physical exercise program geared toward those who have to be seated for their jobs most of the day. “Deskercise – Sit, Stretch, Strengthen” is a program designed to help those with sedentary desk jobs. It provides a variety of chair exercises you can do to change the negative effects of a sedentary work environment.

When exercising from a chair, there are some basic tips to keep you safe. 1) Choose a chair that allows you to keep your knees at a 90 degree angle when seated. 2) If in a wheelchair, make sure your chairs are securely applied or otherwise immobilize the chair. 3) Try to sit up straight and tall while exercising; maintaining good posture is important. 4) Add resistance to strengthening exercises by incorporating hand weights or resistance bands. 5) Bend forward from your hips, not the waist, keeping your back straight while stretching. 6) Make sure your muscles are warmed up before you stretch.

Here are a couple *Deskercise* activities the program offers to help you get started:

**Shoulder Blade Pinch:**

- 1) Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears.
- 2) Pinch your shoulder blades together by trying to bring your elbows together behind your back.
- 3) Hold for a few seconds, working your way up to a 30 second hold.
- 4) Repeat three to five times.

**Trunk Twist:**

- 1) Sit up straight with your shoulders down and back away from your ears and your feet flat on the floor.
- 2) Hold your arms in front of you with your forearms stacked. (This stance reminds me of a Genie pose – just blink your eyes!)
- 3) Without leaning, twist your torso to the right.
- 4) Return to center, and then twist to the left.
- 5) Repeat 10 times.

Anything you do to increase activity is better for you than just keeping with your current routine. The benefits of increased physical activity are cumulative in nature, so some is always better than none. *Deskercise*, or exercises you can do sitting at a desk, are good to use at work or home. They can be performed by anyone and are not restricted to people who have full mobility. Even if you are using a wheelchair or other types of mobility support, these activities will help your overall physical well-being. Age and weight are also non-factors with most of these exercises. In other words, there is

no excuse that will work for not working to improve physical activity. You will still need to check with your doctor if you have concerns about what your body can handle, but most times it is our mindset, not our body, that prevents us from moving forward!

If you need a boost to help you get started, stop by the Geary County Extension office to pick up a \$5 copy of Walking4Wellness: Four Simple Steps to Achieve Your Best Body and Life or \$2.00 copy of the Deskercise bulletin. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!