How to experience the benefits of walking this 'Walktober'

By Janell Bermes

Fall is the perfect season to lace up your shoes and take a step toward better health. Cooler weather, colorful scenery and crisp air make October an ideal time to get moving outdoors. That's why it's a great time to celebrate Walktober, a month dedicated to promoting physical activity and making walking part of your daily routine.

The 2023 Yellowstone County Community Health Needs Assessment reports that only 29% of county adults regularly do enough aerobic and strengthening activities. Walking is a great way to be active and to help you improve your health, control your weight and increase your fitness level. Walking is the most common form of exercise for most people for a very good reason: It doesn't require any special equipment (beyond a comfortable pair of shoes) or skills, you can do it almost anywhere, and it is low impact.

Why is walking so good for you? Let's break it down, step by step.

As you walk, your muscles use oxygen to move, which makes walking an aerobic exercise This improves cardiovascular health, reduces risk of heart disease and stroke and strengthens your bones and muscles. Every step you take decreases your risk of high blood pressure and cholesterol, improves your mood, sleep quality and boosts your brain health.

This aerobic activity not only helps your heart and lungs, but also benefits your leg muscles, abdominal muscles, shoulders, and arms. One study published in the Journal of American College of Cardiology found that 15 minutes of walking was as beneficial as five minutes of running.

Here are some tips to get walking:

- Grab a friend or team and create a healthy competition with one another. Calculate miles and or minutes and the winning team gets bragging rights.
- Grab the family and Walk the Chalk. Take sidewalk chalk out to your neighborhood streets and write inspirational quotes for those on the sidewalks. Your neighborhood and community will feel uplifted.
- Invite a local community or business leader for a walk and talk. You can meet up at one of the beautiful trails in Billings and get to know some of the leaders in our community while getting your steps in.
- Grab your pets and try some new and interesting trails. Pets love to get out and explore with their favorite humans. They will thank you with tail wags and wet kisses.

The Yellowstone County Safe Routes to School committee is working with local schools on Walktober activities that increase the number of students safely bicycling and walking to and from school. Activities like the Walking School Bus uses volunteers to walk with students along an established route at set stops and times. Students have fun with friends and practice independence while under adult supervision.

Some of Yellowstone County's elementary schools will be celebrating Walktober on October 22. Each school gets a chance to participate in having students walk, bike or roll that day for a chance to win a trophy. To learn more about how your school can participate in Walktober's Walk, Bike and Roll Day, email the Safe Routes to School committee at saferoutestoschoolyc@gmail.com.

Walktober is just the beginning. Keep the momentum going by setting small, achievable goals – like a daily walk around the block or exploring a new trail each weekend. Each step moves you toward better health and a stronger community.

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