

The “Skinny” on Walking

Walking may be the ideal exercise for both mind and body.

According to new research by the University of Illinois, walking may improve one’s mental functioning and help reduce the risk of heart disease and high blood pressure.

As people age certain mental processes decline, such as memory, reaction time, and coordinating several tasks at once. The degree of decline differs from person to person, of course, but the changes are a fact of life due to age-related alterations in the brain.

There is a way to combat the affect of aging on one’s mental processes. Walking helps increase the supply of oxygen that flows to the brain. The more fit someone is aerobically, the more oxygen his or her blood can carry to fuel activities throughout the body. Research suggests that inactive older adults who take up aerobic exercise, such as walking, can slow the

decline in mental agility even if they never exercised before in their lives.

A short, brisk daily walk will help increase one’s mental coordination and reaction. Walking a little bit farther adds even more health benefits. Experts recommend walking 30 minutes every day to reduce heart disease and high blood pressure.

When walking, the focus should be on distance and time, not speed. Walking speed declines with age, and the elderly often shuffle because of poor balance. Trying to increase speed too fast may increase the risk of injury. To increase walking speed without causing physical harm, consider positive thinking. Studies show seniors with a positive attitude about aging are more likely to pick up the pace.

How well older adults walk is key to their health and independence. To improve mental and physical health, try walking the extra mile.