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Transform walking into the highlight of each day

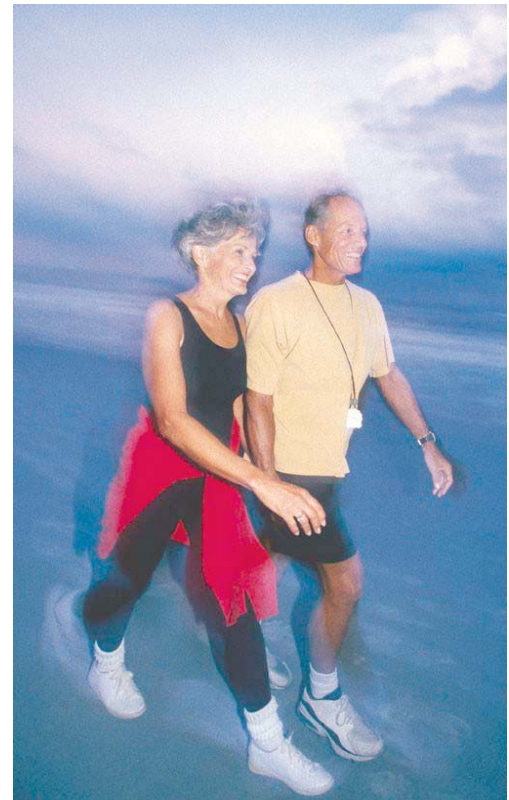
By Ward Luthi and Christine Schnitzer

Which will motivate your clients more? The remembrance of a beautiful sunrise walk, where the flight of a bird, the glimpse of a red fox or the blossoming of a daffodil lifts their spirits and reminds them of their connection with nature...or the logging of minutes, pace and heart rate?

Over the past 20 years, the natural and pleasurable act of walking has been fit into the paradigm of the doctor, the exercise physiologist and the public health official. What was once a simple and effective method of transportation and a well-used method of boosting the spirits or quieting the mind has become a program divided into energy units burned, steps counted, miles per hour and lung capacity measured.

Walking as an exercise prescription is certainly most appropriate and very timely in that we are in the midst of an obesity and sedentary lifestyle crisis. Walking for good health and well-being is the absolute right message.

In fact, Richard Baney, Jr, MD, assistant medical director at Melbourne Internal Medicine Associates in Florida, states, "We physicians spend too much time chasing diseases that could be prevented. Walking is the one form of exercise that I recommend that most all of my patients should embrace to prevent those life-shortening conditions. The beauty of walking is that almost anyone can do it. If you have a partner and/or purpose, it's that much easier. Exercise and physical fitness are always a part of my Rx to patients."



You can add purpose to the exercise prescription by teaching the holistic side of walking as a way to quiet the mind, enjoy the company of a companion, think through complex issues, boost the spirit and even to connect with nature. Along with the times when it is necessary to log the miles, pace and calories burned, you can offer your clients the chance to reminisce about the most beautiful place in the world where they once walked or the most extraordinary conversation they had with a loved one while walking. A holistic approach inspires people to associate walking with the most pleasurable experiences of their lives, and to be fit and well enough to look forward to appreciating all that lies ahead of them.

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Appropriate for

-  **Athlete**
-  **Active now**
-  **Getting started**
-  **Needs a little help**
-  **Needs ongoing assistance**

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The joy of walking

When you inspire your clients by connecting them to the joys of walking, a daily walk becomes a ritual. A ritual that sparks their enthusiasm and calls them to explore the world within and without through their powers of observation and appreciation.

We all know “how” to walk, but do we know enough about how to enjoy our walks?

With a little creativity and passion, you can be the catalyst for change by helping people remember the real joys of walking. You can:

- Create an atmosphere in your walks that challenges your residents or members to open up to the world again, in a way they used to when they were younger.
- Rekindle in your clients the childhood memories of playing in the woods, digging in the garden with a grandparent, learning about the change of seasons and the joy experienced while skimming a rock across a body of water.
- Stimulate your clients to learn to savor each step by using the full range of their senses to make each walk a ‘journey of wonder.’
- Let them discover how this “new way of walking” in any environment, at any time of year, can motivate them to continue to learn, share with others and even make the world a better place.

Look at walking in the broadest context. A walk can be down a hallway, or to the garden and back. Sitting while using a recumbent step machine can count as walking, as can walking in place in a swimming pool. Many people enjoy walking in malls or along the sidewalks of their communities. More frail people use their walkers to circle the activity or exercise room. When you think about adding a holistic approach to walking, include all these options to meet the needs of a variety

of functional levels. You’ll find ideas for the functional levels on page 5.

The following ideas can help you integrate these concepts into walks that are motivating and enjoyable.

Walking idea #1: Music

Add music that enhances the focus of the day’s walk or identifies the theme. A good example is “Seven Wonders” by David Roth (Wind River Records). The setting for this lovely tune is a classroom where the teacher asks the students to name The Seven Wonders of the World. As expected, the students call out the physical wonders but one student has a different view on the topic.

The refrain is:

“To touch, taste and feel,
Hear and smell and see,
Breathe and laugh and love someone,
These are all wonders to me.”

Setting the tone for each walk with music or a theme that helps people appreciate life and living makes the walk purposeful and memorable. You can play music on a boombox as part of the preparation for a theme walk. Use music as part of an intellectual discussion prior to the walk and then as background music as the group stretches and cools down.

Walking idea #2: Connect to the community

Whether your clients are living in senior housing communities, suburban or urban settings, everyone can assess how they can contribute to the betterment of their community. Connecting to a greater cause gives purpose to the walking group. While walking and being keenly aware of one’s surroundings, people can often identify an area or issue that could use a little improvement. As eloquently stated by Margaret Mead, “Never believe that a few

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Deliver fun, variety and education

- Laugh often, lighten up the mood and brighten up the environment!
- Laughter is contagious; catch it and share it!
- Stretch to music, learn the words to a particular song and then sing the song as a group while walking.
- Photograph and share success with the media, family members and those you invite to join your organization.

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caring people can't change the world. Indeed, that's the only thing that ever has."

Hallways and stairwells that are properly lit and decorated offer safe and interesting indoor walking environments. Ideas on this topic include adding artwork and lighting to indoor hallways to encourage walking. Artwork in the halls can simulate an art gallery stroll that could evolve into discussions on the artists, their country of origin, history and style of painting.

Carry bags and pick up litter along the way. Participate in Keep America Beautiful or Adopt A Road projects, remove graffiti, help a friend with an outdoor cleanup project, or register for a 5 kilometer walk that raises money for a particular cause.

Walking idea #3: Liveable and walkable communities

Efforts are underway to revamp some communities and create new town centers as livable and walkable communities. An organization that is advising governments on these issues is Walkable Communities, Inc. Dan Burden, director of Walkable Communities, identifies 12 major components that make walking safer, more enjoyable and functional in cities and neighborhoods. He states that Walkable Communities have:

- intact town centers with a main street and stores
- residential densities, mixed incomes and mixed uses
- public space
- universal design
- key streets that are speed controlled
- streets and trails that are well linked
- designs that are properly scaled
- towns that are designed for people (not just cars)
- towns that 'think small'
- many people that are out walking (safe from crime)
- towns and neighbors that have a vision
- decision makers who are visionary; community leaders who are forward thinkers



Start a discussion on walkable communities as you walk. Once the concepts are discussed, this may be an opportunity for walkers to connect to the community by joining advisory planning boards or petitioning local government officials.

Walking idea #4: Reconnect to nature

To help your clients open their minds to the possibilities of new experiences with each walk, suggest that each outdoor walk focus on a specific item. For example, a series of walks could include:

- identifying the types of trees that are along the walking route
- noting the flowers that are in bloom
- discussing animals that are spotted (even statues or drawings of animals!)
- recognizing the smells (negative or positive) that are encountered
- recommending that the clients touch, feel and smell the plants, the statues or other items

As follow-up, walkers can further learn about the items they identified by searching the Internet or visiting the library and then bringing more information to the group for the next walking session.

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Walking idea #5: Connect walking to the 6 dimensions of wellness

Try developing the walking program within the dimensions.

Emotional. Recognizing that regular walking can elevate mood, make programs available on a daily basis using all available venues (indoors, aquatics, malls, nature trails, city sidewalks, large stores, parking lots). Take advantage of every opportunity to use walking as a way to bring peace, contentment and reflection to the lives of your residents/clients. The increased energy that participants find can help to improve their overall outlook on life and help to preserve their health and mobility.

Intellectual. Schedule an outing to a new destination. Research the area's history, culture and cuisine, and share findings at a discussion group prior to the outing. Offer information to others in your group to motivate them to join the 'walking movement.' Registering your group with a national program like the American Heart Association's Choose to Move can facilitate learning and generate excitement.

Physical. Use appropriate fitness measures to mark members' cardiovascular, strength, balance and flexibility start points and to set measurable goals. Revisit these measures quarterly. Use quiet, dynamic stretching as a way to bring awareness to the amazing potential of our bodies.

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Resources

Active.com
Registration for competitive events and community activities
www.active.com

About Walking
Information and calorie and distance calculators
www.walking.about.com

AARP, Walking
Walking education and programs
www.aarp.org/walking

American Volkssport Association
Walking clubs and walking events
www.ava.org

Choose to Move
American Heart Association
Physical activity program for women
www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3034835

ICAA Walking resource center
Walking articles and programs
www.icaa.cc/walkinghome.htm

In-Home Walking
Walking in small areas on VHS and DVD
www.lesliesansone.com

Maggie Spilner's Walk for All Seasons
Trips and travel sites for walking
www.walkforallseasons.com

NuStep TRS 4000
Seated, recumbent cross trainer
www.nustep.com

Quoteland.com
Quotations on every topic, by every author
www.quoteland.com

Red Hat Society
Social organization for women over 50
www.redhatsociety.com/

Walkable Communities, Inc.
Resources to make communities more pedestrian friendly
www.walkable.org

Walking the World
Adventure walking/adventure travel for the 50+ population
www.walkingtheworld.com

Wind River Records
Record label for David Roth
www.folkera.com/windriver/index.html

Everyone can walk

Offer walking as an activity for all levels of mobility; recognize the level of fitness and physical capability of each client.

Needs Ongoing Assistance

Seated recumbent cross trainers like the NuStep TRS 4000 or cycles that have step counters can be used by many who have limited mobility. While individuals step or pedal, use memory enhancing and reminiscing techniques, such as engaging the participant in conversations about positive current events or important family happenings like weddings, births of grandchildren and anniversaries.

Set walking goals linked to improving individual Activities of Daily Living skills. Physical, recreation and occupational therapists can assist people with particular issues regarding use of walkers, canes and transfers as part of the walking program.

Needs a little help

Seated marches, recumbent steppers and cycles are appropriate. Buddy systems and group walking/social events work very well. Fitness classes can help to improve the cardiovascular, strength, flexibility and balance levels of this group. Link and set goals as they relate to maintaining or regaining independence in all facets of life. Walk, rest, walk, talk, walk, rest, and so forth.

Getting Started

Design walking programs based on fitness markers. Introduce FIT concepts (Frequency, Intensity, Time). Educate clients regarding heart rate monitoring, blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis and cardiovascular, strength, balance and flexibility conditioning as they relate to walking for wellness. Calorie calculators and Body Mass Index calculators can inspire those who are getting started with their walking programs.

Active Now

Enlighten these walkers on products and services that can enhance their walking experience on physical and emotional levels. Teach the use of heart rate monitors, GPS (global positioning system), Nordic walking poles, high-tech shoes and apparel.

You can add DVD instructional tapes, tai chi, cross training and yoga in group class settings and before and after the walks. Provide resources for members from the Internet, book stores or local library. Offer adventure travel (local, national and international) to celebrate their levels of fitness and to encourage higher goal setting.

Athlete

Local and national organizations hold events where older adults can strive for personal bests or compete against others. For example, United States Masters Swimming (www.usms.org), The National Senior Games Association (www.nsga.com) and local age-group running/walking events provide excellent opportunities for older adults.

Invite athletes to be peer counselors and to be quoted in press releases about your organization. They can bring an abundance of positive press to your program, and to active aging in general.

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Social. Regularly schedule your walking events to visit someone who needs company, partner with a local school to create intergenerational walking groups or start a Walk to Lunch Bunch. Also, integrate walking into the fabric of groups and organizations that are already in place. For example, the Red Hat Society ladies could attend a community walk together while wearing their red hats and purple attire.

Vocational. Study and identify a purpose for the group. Many local governments, recreation departments and/or places of worship could very likely utilize the services of people who walk. Reconnect to community by contributing to a greater cause.

Spiritual. Introduce the quiet (silent) walking concept to participants. Use walking as a form of meditation even when conducting group walks. Walk a few minutes each day focusing on the quiet, peaceful potential of walking. Use quotes and the philosophy of those people who can inspire others. John Muir has 2 applicable thoughts on walking:

“I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.”

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.”

Walking as motivator

Yes, it is absolutely critical for those working with older adults to understand exercise science, gerontology, chronic conditions, proper nutrition, fall prevention, the effects of medications during exercise, family dynamics and more. But also be cognizant of the research that points to what really motivates older adults to stay well and active.

Dancing at a grandchild’s wedding, continuing to drive, counseling a friend and

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Walking session steps

As with any physical activity/exercise, the safety of the clients is of utmost importance. Recommend that each person speak to a medical professional before starting the program.

Follow the fitness protocol for every session. Generally speaking:

1. Start to walk around a bit.
2. Ask people to check-in with their overall health, prior injuries, chronic conditions or temporary problems prior to beginning so they pace themselves appropriately.
3. Perform light stretching of the major muscles.
4. Walk at a warm-up pace.
5. Increase pace and intensity per individual fitness level.
6. Walk at a cool-down pace.
7. Stretch safely and plan the next walking event.

Call for authors

How do you successfully communicate with your participants? Do you have a class or an activity that is effective? What exercises are useful for your clients?

Functional U[®] is your publication, and you are an important part of getting practical information to your peers.

Exercises, activities, communication skills...share your knowledge.

Send your article ideas to patryan@icaa.cc.

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traveling to see the world with a sense of anticipation are the things that people embrace and will commit their 'lives' to and their 'living' to.

Finally, take it upon yourself to 'walk the walk.' Choose to lead an active lifestyle, motivate and empower others and leave the world—your world—in just a little better condition than you found it. ▼

(The authors thank Maggie Spilner for the work she did in helping develop this article.)

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What is “Get Fit on Route 66”?

AARP’s Get Fit on Route 66 is a physical activity adventure designed to inspire older adults to be more active as they trace the famous route of this virtual highway. Whatever physical activity your clients enjoy doing—tennis, jogging, swimming, biking, softball, or something else—this is a fun way to encourage them to keep fit.

The program goal is to “travel” from Chicago to Santa Monica (2,448 miles) by recording physical activity minutes. Participants record minutes of exercise online, where the software will convert the minutes to miles; one minute equals one mile. Each person sets the pace, whether it’s 10 or 60 miles a day.

Who Can Participate?

Everyone can participate—occasional, regular and advanced participation levels make it challenging and fun to complete the route.

How Do People Get Started?

Visit Get Fit on Route 66 [www.aarp.org/walking] and register for this free program from AARP. We celebrate the attitude that age is just a number and life is what you make it.