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Get Fit, Stay Fit, and Have Fun Doing It™



WHY FITHEADS® WORKS: A PHYSICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Written by Chris Sciamanna, M.D., M.P.H.

Every day I see people who are carrying the weight of years of excess. Not just the physical weight, but the emotional weight as well.

There is no shortage of potentially effective methods for losing weight and getting more fit. The health benefits of regular moderate exercise are well proven. However, it is my experience that the issue faced by many of my patients at the Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center is an inability to stick with the lifestyle changes they are trying to make. Addressing that issue is the element of the FitHeads® System that first intrigued me – the process of building self-efficacy – a belief that a person can and will achieve their weight loss and fitness goals; and the provision of tools and support to deal with the inevitable setbacks.

I was particularly interested in the Behavioral Modeling approach taken in creating the system – the identification of the key success determinants of people who had previously been unsuccessful at maintaining an exercise regimen, but who had subsequently made changes that allowed them to incorporate exercise into lives. The integration of key psychological, emotional and behavioral success factors into an exercise system that almost anyone can easily adopt is unique in my experience. Another key to improving your probability of success is the small steps approach to building both mental and physical conditioning as people work their way towards walking 10,000 steps per day.

The National Weight Control Registry is an honor roll of dieters who have fought and won. The more than 7,000 people in the registry, who complete regular surveys, have maintained a weight loss of at least 30 pounds for at least one year. The data shows great variety in how people lose weight. But those who succeed in maintaining the weight loss sing the same song. One of the most consistent predictors of keeping the weight off is sticking to a physical activity program.

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While any increase in walking will help promote good health, the Centers for Disease Control and the American College of Sports Medicine recommends 30 minutes of moderate activity per day, on five or more days each week, to produce the best, long-term health benefits for most people. As you gradually build to 10,000 steps each day, you'll easily be meeting this 30-minute goal.

I became involved with the development of the FitHeads System because of the potential I saw for it to benefit the multitude of Americans facing the same issues as my patients. The statistics on obesity are alarming, and worsening. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in 1998 seven states had a prevalence of obesity 20 percent or higher, with no state exceeding 25 percent. By 2007 only one state (Colorado) had a prevalence less than 20 percent, with 30 states reaching or exceeding 25 percent. The impact of this trend on a host of serious diseases has been well established, as has the beneficial effect of a regular program of moderate physical exercise, such as the walking program the FitHeads System is built on.

Here is a short list of ways that walking can reduce the risks and impacts of serious disease. Moderately intense activities such as walking can:

- Reduce cardiovascular disease by as much as 30-50 percent.
- Decrease osteoarthritis pain, and improve stability, endurance, and agility.
- Reduce the risk of colon cancer.
- Protect against diabetes in high-risk people, and lower blood glucose and improve insulin action in diabetics.
- Lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart attack.

In addition to reducing your risk of serious health conditions, you'll develop healthier bones and stronger joints. You'll reduce your risk of colds, flu and other minor ailments. You'll enhance your flexibility and overall fitness levels. Many active people find that they sleep better, and have more energy. Walking reduces fat, improves your circulation, relieves stress, and leads to far fewer injuries than other activities.

The benefits are not restricted to physical rewards. Regular walking can increase your mental acuity, allowing you to think more clearly and handle stressful situations with better control. The name of FitHeads comes in part from the improvement in many key brain functions that exercise has been demonstrated to promote.

As people increase their physical activity they often find an accompanying increase in self-esteem. They not only feel better, they feel better about themselves. Active people typically have a brighter outlook than their sedentary counterparts, and they remain more mentally sharp as they progress into their golden years.

Once you get up to 10,000 steps the average person will be burning about 500 extra calories a day. At that rate it takes only a week to add up to the 3,500 calories needed to lose one pound. For those who need to lose a lot of weight, that's over 50 pounds a year; and more important than that, you'll feel great. Many people notice that this level of activity helps them to feel less stressed, anxious and depressed. It's good for both your body and mind.

Simply put, there's no exercise regimen that's easier and more effective than walking 10,000 steps a day at a moderate pace if your objectives are steady weight loss, getting fit and staying fit.

The list of benefits is long, but perhaps the most important is the example it sets for our children.

For more information about the FitHeads System, go to www.FitHeads.com.

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