



HEALTHCARE FACT SHEET

Walking

Issue statement

More than 60 percent of all adults in the United States do not engage in the recommended amount of physical activity. This lack of regular physical exercise can lead to illness and chronic diseases that cost billions of dollars in healthcare costs each year. In fact, increasing regular moderate physical activity among the more than 88 million inactive Americans over the age of 15 might reduce annual healthcare costs by as much as \$76.6 billion. Regular, brisk walking is one of the simplest and safest forms of physical exercise. A regular walking program can help control weight, condition the heart and lungs, strengthen bones, and help control the cost of healthcare.

Key facts, national statistics

- More than 60 percent of adults in the United States do not engage in the recommended amount of physical activity, and approximately 25 percent of American adults are not active at all. (*U.S Department of Health and Human Services, "Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General," 1996.*)
- When done briskly on a regular basis, walking can have many positive impacts on health, including:
 - Decreasing the risk of a heart attack – Walking helps lower low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol) and raise high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol ("good" cholesterol). Regular exercise can also help keep your blood pressure in check, and reduces your risk of blood clots and irregular heartbeats. (*Mayo*



Foundation for Medical Education and Research, "Walking for Fitness, Taking Steps in the Right Direction," December 19, 2002.)

- Reducing the risk of developing type 2 diabetes – For individuals with type 2 diabetes, regular exercise may help decrease the amount of insulin or other medications needed to control their condition. *(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, "Walking for Fitness, Taking Steps in the Right Direction," December 19, 2002.)*
- Helping to control weight – Taking a brisk, one-hour walk burns approximately 400 calories for the average person. *(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, "Walking for Fitness, Taking Steps in the Right Direction," December 19, 2002.)*
- Improving muscle tone – Walking leads to lean, toned muscles, and keeps bones and joints in shape, minimizing the effects of osteoporosis and arthritis. *(Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, "Walking for Fitness, Taking Steps in the Right Direction," December 19, 2002.)*
- Walking is the only exercise in which the rate of participation does not decline in the middle and later years. In a national survey, the highest percentage of regular walkers for any group (39.4%) was found among men 65 years of age and older. *(President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.)*
- Walking burns approximately the same amount of calories per mile as does running. For example, walking briskly for one mile in 15 minutes burns about the same number of calories as jogging an equal distance in 8.5 minutes. *(President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.)*
- In weight-bearing activities like walking, heavier individuals will burn more calories than lighter persons. For example, studies show that a 110-pound person burns about half as many calories as a 216-pound



person walking at the same pace for the same distance. (*President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.*)

- Recent studies show that there are residual benefits to vigorous exercise. For a period of time after a dynamic workout, such as brisk walking, metabolism remains elevated above normal, which results in additional calories burned. (*President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.*)
- Obesity increases a person's risk for negative health consequences, and affects more people than does smoking or heavy drinking. Approximately 23 percent of Americans are obese and another 36 percent are overweight. By contrast, 6 percent are heavy drinkers and 19 percent are daily smokers. (*Rand Health, "The Effects of Obesity, Smoking and Problem Drinking on Chronic Medical Problems and Health Care Costs," R. Strum, February 2002.*)
- Going for a walk is a great way to reduce stress and promote an overall sense of wellness. Regular walking can reduce feelings of depression and anxiety as well. (*Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, December 2002.*)
- Increasing regular, moderate physical activity among the more than 88 million inactive Americans over the age of 15 might reduce annual healthcare costs by as much as \$76.6 billion. (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Physical Activity Fundamental to Preventing Disease," 2002.*)
- In 1995, healthcare costs attributed to obesity amounted to an estimated \$99 billion. In 2000, that number rose to \$117 billion, an increase of 18 percent. (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity," 2001.*)
- Physical inactivity can lead to chronic diseases and conditions like heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, diabetes, obesity, arthritis and



osteoporosis. Healthcare costs related to these conditions total more than \$600 billion nationally. (*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Physical Activity Fundamental to Preventing Disease," 2002.*)

- Obesity is costing more than smoking, drinking or poverty. Obesity is associated with a 36 percent increase in health spending, more than smoking (21%) and drinking (14%). (*Rand Health, "The Effects of Obesity, Smoking and Problem Drinking on Chronic Medical Problems and Health Care Costs," R. Strum, February 2002.*)
- Obese individuals spend 77 percent more on medications. Only aging has a greater effect on medication spending. (*Rand Health, "The Effects of Obesity, Smoking and Problem Drinking on Chronic Medical Problems and Health Care Costs," R. Strum, February 2002.*)
- Obese individuals suffer from a 67 percent increase in chronic diseases, higher than smoking (25%), drinking (12%) or poverty (58%). (*Rand Health, "The Effects of Obesity, Smoking and Problem Drinking on Chronic Medical Problems and Health Care Costs," R. Strum, February 2002.*)
- Being obese is equivalent to aging 20 years. (*Rand Health, "The Effects of Obesity, Smoking and Problem Drinking on Chronic Medical Problems and Health Care Costs," R. Strum, February 2002.*)

Statements from key facts

- We can all make everyday choices to be more physically active—to take the stairs instead of the elevator, to walk the dog instead of watching television, to walk to the subway instead of getting dropped off.
- Walking is one of the simplest, safest and most effective ways to get regular exercise. When done briskly on a regular basis, walking can



reduce blood pressure, increase the efficiency of the heart and lungs, boost bone strength, and help burn excess calories.

- Talk with your doctor to devise a regular walking program that works for you, one that is tailored to your physical condition and lifestyle.
- Use a pedometer to track and help you increase the number of steps you take every day. Log on to www.bcbsne.com to find out about our WalkingWorks Walking Program and how you can get a reduced cost pedometer.

Editorial copy, utilizing the statistics and statements, for newsletters, advertorials and other Plan-written pieces

Stairs or escalator? Park close to the door or at the far end of the parking lot? We can all make everyday choices to be more physically active—to take an after-dinner walk with your family instead of watching television, to walk to the subway instead of getting dropped off. We don't have to set aside a big part of our busy day to achieve real results. One of the best ways is to simply walk more at every opportunity. With America spending more than ever on preventable health problems like obesity, heart disease and diabetes, every step counts. In fact, it is estimated that increasing regular, moderate physical activity among the more than 88 million inactive Americans over the age of 15 might reduce annual healthcare costs by as much as \$76.6 billion.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, more than 60 percent of adults in the United States do not engage in the recommended amount of physical activity, and approximately 25 percent of American adults are not active at all. Physical inactivity can lead to chronic diseases and conditions like heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, diabetes, obesity, arthritis and



osteoporosis. Healthcare costs related to these conditions total more than \$600 billion nationally.

Walking is one of the simplest, safest and most effective ways to get regular exercise. When done briskly on a regular basis, walking can reduce blood pressure, increase the efficiency of the heart and lungs, boost bone strength, and help burn excess calories. In fact, walking briskly for one mile in 15 minutes burns about the same number of calories as jogging an equal distance in 8.5 minutes. And walking an extra 20 minutes each day will burn off 7 pounds of body fat per year. With each step you take, you will be helping to prevent chronic health conditions. That's important to everyone, because America is spending more than ever on health problems that can be prevented.

We all have a role to play in keeping healthcare affordable. Because we all pay for the rising cost of healthcare through increased premiums, copays and deductibles, we all have a stake in this. So talk with your doctor to develop a walking program that's right for you. It will keep you healthier, which in turn can help control the rising cost of healthcare. Visit Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska's Web site (www.bcbsne.com) for more ways each of us can help keep healthcare affordable.