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BALANCE

A wellness update for your work, health, life

How to stay fit during the winter months

According to a recent Canadian Health Measures Study, most Canadian adults spend their waking hours sitting down, and only engage in about four hours of light physical activity per day. Only 35 per cent manage to accumulate about 10,000 steps each day, the minimum number recommended to improve overall health.

Today, pedometers like Fitbit™ are interactive, meaning you can track and sync your activity from multiple devices. If you have an activity tracker, you're likely familiar with the 10,000 step goal. Here's a look at what studies have shown:

- People who walk 10,000 steps a day and work out at the gym three times a week can add five years to their lives.
- Completing a 10,000 step program can significantly increase weight loss, while improving circulation, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Equipped with a pedometer, the average walker will increase their daily steps by more than 2,100 steps a day. By setting goals, these individuals are more successful at reaching 10,000 steps a day.
- Vigorous physical activity, reduced stress levels, and increased brain function are positively co-related.

Supported by online and mobile functions and features, most pedometers make counting steps easy and fun, and help keep you motivated. Nonetheless, unfavourable weather conditions can hamper your best intentions and make it more difficult to step, step, step. Here are some tips to help you navigate the winter weather and ensure you reach your 10,000 steps a day.

How to reach 10,000 steps daily

- **Walk to a colleague's desk rather than send an email.** Need to ask a colleague a question or share an insight? While email is fast and easy, it is an inactivity trap. Imagine how many extra steps you can accumulate at the office if you walk across the building to personally ask your question or share your ideas. Not only can you increase your step count, you may find that your interoffice relationships improve as well.

- **Take the stairs.** Elevators and escalators are convenient but they don't get your body moving.

- **Go winter hiking or on a snowshoeing trip with the family.** When the weather's beautiful, it's much easier to get outside for some extra steps. From walking the dog around the neighborhood to hiking with the family, pleasant weather invites you outdoors. Depending on whether there's snow on the ground, consider a winter hike or a snowshoeing adventure with your family.

- **Park at the far end of the mall.** A common tip for getting more steps is to park at the far end of the parking lot. Ice, snow or rain can make that an unpleasant option in the winter; however, you could park close to the mall entrance but on the side farthest from your intended destination. This allows you to get those steps in and provides you with a warmer, more welcoming environment.

- **Take advantage of fitness programs.** Check if your employee and family assistance program (EFAP) includes fitness coaching; it can help you understand and improve your mental and physical health through fitness. You may also be able to find organized walking groups at your local community centre.

- **Go on indoor walks.** When the weather is awful, walk indoors. Create a mini track in your house or walk laps inside the local shopping mall.

- **Set up activity tracker alerts.** Interactive pedometers can be synced to your computer or smart phone. For example, Fitbit™ can send notifications to your smartphone when you've hit 75%, 100%, and 125% of your daily goal. That notification when you're just 25% away from your goal can nudge you to get moving again.

How to champion your fitness

The Winter Olympics never fail to impress. Whether you're a hockey fan or hooked on ice dancing, speed skating, or curling, watching the winter games is the next best thing to actually playing in the snow or on the ice. Though it's tempting to watch the games on TV non-stop, why not go out and play? You too can become a champion of fitness!

Create some fitness action steps

1. **Start with a realistic goal.** While Olympic athletes are at the top of their game, they certainly didn't start there. For example, if you haven't gone running since high school, jogging five miles a day may be unrealistic. However, walking for twenty minutes at lunch each day could be attainable. The acronym "SMART" is often used for goal-setting: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timed. Health Canada suggests answering the following questions as you formulate your SMART goals:

    - What do I want to do?
    - How much and how often will I do it?
    - How will I do it?
    - Can I do it?
    - When will I do it?

2. **Consider where you are now.** For example, if your goal is to eventually walk 10,000 steps per day, go ahead and track your steps before you begin working up to your goal. What does your "before" look like? By setting a benchmark as well as a goal, you'll be better able to see how far you've come. Each step forward is a step in the right direction!

3. **Ease into it.** Sure, you may want to go for the gold, but rushing into a fitness program can be counterintuitive. For starters, doing so may not align with your SMART fitness goals (especially the realistic part). Overdoing it could also lead to burnout or physical injuries. While it's fun to watch your favourite Olympians push their bodies to the limits, a more conservative approach is just as fun and better for you in the long run.

    Another reason to ease into your new fitness routine is to help solidify it as a part of your healthy lifestyle. For example, you might start by taking the stairs each day instead of the elevator in an effort to accumulate more steps. Soon it will become part of your routine and you'll automatically head for the stairwell. Once that becomes second-nature, you will be ready to tackle your next short-term goal.

Setting SMART goals, understanding where you are now and where you want to go, and easing into your fitness routine are three steps you can take to champion your fitness.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) can help.
You can receive support through a variety of resources. Call your EFAP at **1 800 387-4765** or visit workhealthlife.com.

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Resources:

https://www.workhealthlife.com/article/Read/2c14dc27-408f-4089-8548-50f99bbc32b7?taxId=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&section=1
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/educ-comm/toolkit-trousse/plan-3-eng.php
http://www.sparkpeople.com/resource/fitness_articles.asp?id=1595
http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community-health-services-wellness-injury-prevention/physical-activity-active-living.page

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