

Be a Fighter

by Kim Flick

MARIELDERS Transportation Coordinator

The next time you notice folks walking, don't mistake them for ordinary people. Those walkers are actually **Fighters**. They are single-handedly battling the effects of a sedentary lifestyle. They are on their feet, engaged in an assault against cardiovascular disease, stomping down the threat of cancer, attacking arthritis and osteoporosis. High blood pressure and depression are under siege by these seemingly pleasant walkers. This dramatization illustrates a point of fact. Sedentary lifestyles increase all causes of mortality.

Humans were designed to move. This was essential to our survival as a species. But in the past several decades, the increase in inactivity has been something we should stand up and take notice of. We sit in cars or in front of screens for work and leisure time. Consequently we burn fewer calories, gain weight and lose muscle strength.

If this makes you feel overwhelmed, remember you do not have to take this sitting down. Stand up. Be a **Fighter**. Walking is affordable and easy. It's aerobic and burns body fat. Your circulation improves lowering the risk of stroke. It strengthens your bones and reduces the risk of fractures. Your muscle strength increases, taking the pressure off your joints, reducing the effects of arthritis. Walking can improve your mood, releasing endorphins, a natural pain reliever. You'll sleep better. You'll breathe better. Walking can slow mental decline. A study from the University of Virginia Health System in Charlottesville, found that men between the ages of 71 and 93 who walked more than a quarter mile per day, had half the incidence of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, compared to those who walked less. The Arthritis Foundation suggests that you "shoot for 30 minutes to an hour of walking per day as your ultimate goal. If you're starting out, try 5 minutes three times a day and increase as you build strong bones and muscles, become more limber and have less pain".

Here are some walking technique tips from the Mayo Clinic. Your head is up and you're looking forward, not at the ground – using your peripheral vision too. Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed. Swing your arms freely. Stomach muscles should be slightly tight and your back straight. Walk smoothly, rolling your foot heel to toe. Walk confidently.

Choose shoes with proper arch support and thick flexible soles to absorb shock. Layer comfortable clothes appropriate for the weather. Avoid paths with uneven turf, cracked sidewalks and low-hanging limbs. Take your phone with you. If the weather is too rough, implement "plan B", your indoor track. Kenwood Towne Centre opens every day for mall walkers at 8am, Eastgate Mall opens at 8:30, 10 on Sundays. Warm up for 5-10 minutes and then pick up the pace. Cool down in the same way, to let your muscles relax. Drink ample amounts of water to keep your mind sharp and your organs, joints and muscles hydrated. Keep track of how much you walk. Being a walker takes commitment and initiative. If you skip days, get right back on track. If nature is your thing, check out the trails at Great Parks of Hamilton County, Cincinnati Parks, Cincinnati Nature Center, to name a few. If walking alone isn't your thing, invite a friend to join the fight. You're fighting for a better, healthier life.

Find some walking buddies at THE MARIELDERS Center. Also, Mindful Maintenance Exercise classes are held at 10am Monday through Friday. Line Dancing is on Thursdays at Fairfax Cribbet Center. Check out Marielders.org to find more active and engaging programs for adults over 55.