

HEALTHY HOMEWORK

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As a clinic focused on a holistic approach to health, patient responsibility is the essential element in creating an optimal health plan. We have created healthy homework that offers tools to challenge you in making positive changes in your lifestyle and possibly accelerate your level of healing. We feel that true health is not just physical comfort, but a holistic union of well being on all levels. This is why we present your homework focus in 3 different perspectives-body, mind and spirit. We will explore 3 different ways of approaching one singular subject. In this case we will look at walking and 3 different ways to reap its benefits and possibly deepen your experience and enjoyment of this form of exercise. It is always important to remember that your healthcare is your own practice, so follow what feels best for you. This may mean pushing comfort zones at times and pulling back at others. Please experiment and enjoy this exercise program on all levels... mind, body and spirit.

This month's article: WALKING

Walking—the active way to reduce stress, get fresh air and relax the mind with some contemplation time.



BODY

Sometimes in life, the simple things seem to good to be true. Walking is one of those simple things that could possibly seem too easy and straightforward to play an effective role in health management. This is a myth that keep many people off walkways and

treadmills, believing that rigorous marathons and weight lifting may be the only way to fitness. Many recent studies have shown the surprising amount of health benefits associated with walking. Some of these include helping to increase bone density in post-menopausal women, boosting the immune system, lowering blood pressure and reducing the risk for colon cancer and diabetes.

Keeping a balance between muscle strength and flexibility has a direct influence on our musculoskeletal health. It's low risk factor for injury and strain make walking a safe and effective way to stay active when regaining and maintaining health. Increasing oxygen and blood flow in the body strengthens and nourishes the muscles and all surrounding areas, including the spine. Walking is an activity that engages almost all the bones and muscles in the body. With a combination of breathing and stretching, integrating walking into your life can help keep your back limber and strong, facilitating optimal spinal health and maintenance.

HOMEWORK

Explore different ways of integrating walking into your daily life. Whether it's walking to work or scheduling a walking visit instead of coffee with a friend or taking a drive out to the country to enjoy an easy hike in nature. The greatest thing about walking is its simplicity. It is important to do what appeals to you because this is what is going to keep you interested over time. The task is to make the commitment and build upon it. So if that's taking an after dinner stroll for 10 minutes every evening, work your way up to 20 when you feel you are ready. Look for windows to fit a walk in, even if it's taking the stairs instead of the elevator or taking the time to walk rather than finding the nearest parking spot. Go at your own pace, wear comfortable and supportive shoes and enjoy the process. Congratulate yourself on stepping out of the ordinary.

MIND

The mind is a very powerful and your thoughts play a critical role in maintaining your good health. The difference between positive and negative thinking can be the difference between feeling more joy and vitality or feeling defeat and apathy. Busy thoughts and calm thoughts are the difference between stress and ease. These feelings all effect your physical health and how you are able to progress within your healing. If you don't think well,... how can you feel well?

Taking the time to go for a walk can be a benefit for your state of mind along with your body. Walking can bring a sense of wellbeing and give an opportunity for reflection and peace. Studies have shown that a walk immediately reduces tension, anxiety and blood pressure. Walking has a rhythm, it's pace

requires a certain flow that 'slows us down'. This can result in a relaxing effect on the mind. Scattered thoughts and chatter has a chance to rest in the steady footsteps of your feet. Walking can, in a sense, force us into distraction. If it's a snow frosted city park or an early morning sun-scattered downtown, there is always so much to see. It is an opportunity to observe at what you focus on. Is it the beauty around you or the stress and busyness of the city that draws your attention? Walking makes time for us to take a break from what can sometimes seem like all encompassing mind chatter and see what exists outside of ourselves.

HOMEWORK

Develop Awareness: While your walking keep your senses sharp and look in all directions, see what unfolds in front of you. Maybe it's the sight of two friends greeting on a street corner, or the bustle coming from the local coffee shop. It may be the smell of drying grass in the sunlight or the sound of wind through the trees. Simply be present and allow yourself to experience the peace and beauty a walk can bring to your mind. While you walk from scene to scene, invite new thoughts and ideas to come into your mind. If unwanted or old thoughts bite at your heels, focus on the rhythm of your movement and imagine them being released through your feet and into the ground. Focusing your breath can help you relax and stay in the moment. When new and relaxing thoughts are brought to your mind, another level of health can be realized. Inspiration and positive thinking can be given an audience in your walks. It is simply up to you to invite them to speak. Your experience will be totally unique to you, this can become a special time to put aside to be with yourself and the world around you.

SPIRIT

Remember when you were a child and the simple act of going for a walk, or even being outside, could be the most wondrous experience. A child is easily inspired, curious and always playful. The world is full of mysteries and what can seem like simple facts of life for us can pave the road to intricate wonder for a child. If you can remember this feeling of an engaged child it can be helpful to give you a sense of what you spirit may feel like. The spirit can be seen like the seed from which the grand tree of who we are grows

from, the solid base from which the details and intricacies of our life and personality sprout and bloom from. On your walks, observe the trees around you and remember your own roots. If you can remember that the origin of who you are is still very alive and present you may just have an experience of your spirit.

HOMEWORK

As you integrate this walking regime into your life, your homework is to catch yourself at those quiet moments, those times when you aren't worrying or rushing and just feel in the moment and yes, it will happen, even if it is just one moment! Exploring what surrounds you and stepping outside of your mental chatter is the first step. The second step is to then engage with what surrounds you. Experience the simplicity of enjoyment. Deeply breathe in the air around you and pay attention to detail. Allow your child-like enchantment to emerge. This can lead you to a sense of peace and connect you with your surrounding space. This feeling of serenity could be called communion with your spirit, and once you feel it for one moment, you'll realize it's the most familiar feeling out of any other possible. It may feel like the most difficult feeling to attain, but it actually comes through when we let all of the complications fall away. So even if it is for just one moment, practice simplicity and see how it feels. Give yourself permission to be curious again, and experience the resonating good health of the spirit. Your spirit is a very vital part of your being, one that needs attention and care equal and just as real as any other aspect of you.

This simple homework assignment may provide some profound shifts in your quality of health and your quality of life. At first you may not see big changes, but if you stay consistent with these exercises, it is very likely over time, significant results will be experienced. Through your walking practice you can begin the groundwork for a greater relationship with yourself or maybe just the simple satisfaction of the moment, either way, we encourage you to try these concepts and challenge you to discover something new for your precious body, mind and spirit.

We wish you health and happiness as you develop a deeper understanding of what's important to you.◆