

Walking with FMT

Dr Katherine Kulp

Walking: one of life's most simple pleasures. It's also an ideal way to get regular exercise. No time to hit the gym? No problem! 10 minutes of brisk walking is sufficient to get a beneficial cardiovascular response. In fact, some research has shown that walking can have the same benefits on cardiovascular health as running.

Beyond just your heart, researchers continue to extol the vast benefits of walking on both physical and emotional health levels.

Walking can help to prevent the onset of Type II diabetes; a regular walking program can also help to manage blood sugar levels almost as effectively as medication. Walking keeps our minds sharp, and has even been shown to help curb depression. It's also a lifelong exercise program, one that keeps us ageing gracefully.

So why do so many of us opt to let our walking shoes languish out of sight while we sit watching the latest episode of our favourite programme? Knee pain can often prevent us from getting out the door to stay fit. In fact, knee pain is one of the most common reasons cited for discontinuing a walking program.

Perhaps you've investigated the cause of your knee pain to get yourself back on track and been given a diagnosis of patello-femoral pain syndrome, degenerative changes, osteoarthritis, or chondromalacia patellae. Diagnosis is not destiny; it does not mean that you are fated to a life of inactivity or the surgical knife.

Let's look at why — when we take a step, the joints of the foot, knee, hip and even spine should coordinate to absorb and attenuate the shock so that no one part of the body takes all the

impact of the ground. This results in beautiful smooth motion, quiet steps, and a healthy, efficient you! When we have lost this coordination, often due to an injury, improper alignment of the leg or muscle imbalance, our footsteps become hard and heavy and this stress gets concentrated, often at the knees. Think of the knee as an innocent bystander- it is trapped between the foot and the hip, and dysfunction at either one tends to result in too much stress at the knee. Over time, this results in additional wear and tear at the knee. Knee pain shouldn't limit you from walking; instead it should spur you to seek out the root cause of the problem to change the cycle.

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Don't let your knees limit your active lifestyle! Here are some simple, initial steps to take: a proper shoe that creates a relatively neutral alignment of the foot; an active stretching program targeted to the quadriceps, hamstrings and calf muscles helps to ensure the proper length and balance of the muscles; hip stability exercises help strengthen the hip muscles that control the alignment of our knee while we move. Look at your alignment in the mirror: does the knee line up over your second toe or do the knee and foot point in different directions? If so, an individualized physiotherapy program incorporating correction of alignment may be needed to help take the stress off the knee. While knee pain is an incredibly common ailment, the path to optimal function may necessitate an individualised approach, especially if you've had inju-

ries or hip or ankle pain in the past. More and more we understand that surgery is not the answer because the problem isn't just the knee, it's how we're using it. Here's to using your knees well and staying fit and active!



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