

# The physical and psychological benefits of walking



A recent study by a Southern California university professor shows that the more people walk each day, the more energetic they feel and the better their mood.

"People seem to be interested in walking as a health benefit, but here, we're seeing it's not just cardiovascular health and other kinds of physical health that are important, but psychological health as well," explained Robert Thayer, a professor of psychology at California State University, Long Beach. "The more a person walks has a very real and immediate psychological effect that an individual can experience every day."

Thayer and a group of student researchers assessed 37 individuals (12 males and 25 females) over a 20-day period, during which time each participant wore a pedometer from his/her waist from the time they dressed in the morning until just before bed.

At the end of each day, participants completed several rating scales based on their judgments of the entire day, including self-ratings of self-esteem, happiness, overall mood and depression, as well as energy and tension. After making the self-ratings, they noted the number of steps taken that day according to their pedometers.

"We found that there was a clear and strong relationship between the number of steps they took and their overall mood and energy level," said Thayer, author of *Calm Energy: How People Regulate Mood with Food and Exercise*.

"It really indicates that we're talking about a wider phenomenon here than just 'walk more, feel more energy.' We're talking about 'walk more, be happier, have higher self-esteem, be more into your diet and the nutritiousness of your diet.' "

The study of was one of four Thayer and student researchers have done over the last several years.

"In this whole series of studies that we've done, the more you walk in a day, the more energy you experience," Thayer noted. "That's a little counter-intuitive because you would think that when you expend energy, you would not feel as energetic afterwards. But, it turns out that it produces more energy."

Walking, diet and mood

The purpose of this particular study was to determine if there's a wider set of correlations between the amount of walking each day and related mood states. In addition, the researchers sought to identify any relationship between daily walking and nutritiousness of diet as well as perceived health because this could indicate, according to Thayer, that people eat better and experience better health when they walk more.

"The amount of walking each day predicted a wide variety of positive psychological conditions," Thayer said. "Specifically the correlations between the number of steps and self-ratings indicated that when our participants walked more, they rated their diet as more nutritious. They also rated more highly their health, energy, overall mood, happiness and self-esteem, in that order."

The psychology professor pointed out that walking more is increasingly advocated by public health authorities as an excellent form of essential exercise, and recently in the popular media there's the widely advocated suggestion that people should walk 10,000 steps a day for optimal health.

But, there's little scientific evidence supporting this recommendation, and the average number of daily steps for Americans is unclear.