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WALKING 101

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ABSTRACT

Walking holds great potential as a simple method of acquiring and maintaining fitness throughout life. This concept, however, has been uncultivated among college age adults. Significant strides are being taken at Bowling Green State University, to introduce the university community to walking for fitness through the general physical education curriculum.

WALKING 101

The benefits of aerobic exercise have been well established as a means of preventing cardiovascular diseases, reducing stress, controlling weight, and alleviating depression, anxieties, headaches, backaches, and insomnia. The most widely practiced methods of attaining aerobic fitness have been jogging and more recently aerobic dance. Nowhere are there practices in preventive medicine more evident than university campuses, where scores of students jog the streets or bounce to a rhythmical beat in pursuit of fitness.

While university campuses are experiencing a fitness boom, walking as a means of developing fitness has not shared the same popularity with young adults as the more prestigious activities of jogging and aerobic dance. Most young people perceive walking as a basic locomotor skill acquired at about the age of one year, which becomes nothing more than a utilitarian means of setting where mechanized travel will not reach.

Statistics show that walking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity, meaning that the majority of the population perceives it as a satisfying experience when done voluntarily. The recreational interest in walking is evidenced in the formation of walking organizations, increased walking literature, the promotion of walking tours and events and the recognition of the need for non-mechanized recreational trail systems.

Due to the current emphasis on fitness and the participation in recreational walking, it is the contention of the author that "pace walking" holds great potential for a large segment of the adult population as a simple means of acquiring fitness. "Pace walking" is walking at a steady speed, over a period of time, to gain the "training effect" of exercise. It requires no special techniques; one walks briskly in his/her natural gait. It requires only a safe walking place, comfortable walking or running shoes and a watch with a second hand. It is simple; it is natural; it is inexpensive; and a dedicated walker can attain a level of fitness similar to that of a jogger.

Pace walking is literally a "natural" for Health, Physical Education and Recreation curricula, because it is in harmony with the concepts of "wellness" and lifelong leisure skills. While the more vigorous aerobic activities capitalize on youthful energies by

meeting students immediate interests, it is difficult to envision a large segment of these same students running five miles a day or bouncing to an aerobic dance beat at age 50. Conversely, the young person who values walking and incorporates it into his/her young life has the foundation for maintaining a lifelong aerobic exercise program.

As a strong proponent of pace walking, it is not the author's intent to devalue any type of aerobic activity, but rather to promote an awareness of the untapped potential of pace walking as a viable curricular offering. Not everyone enjoys jogging, some people feel foolish aerobic dancing and some students will find no challenge in pace walking. The point is, curriculum planners need to seek new options in meeting students' interests and needs. Pace walking provides such an option.

The following information is based on a pilot course offered at Bowling Green State University.

POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Due to its uniqueness, the course serves the entire university community--i.e., the traditional as well as the non-traditional student. It draws students who find walking enjoyable and want to incorporate it into their life style as a primary means of maintaining fitness. Other students view the class as preparation for a more strenuous aerobic or anaerobic exercise program. Some students' primary objective is to utilize the program in conjunction with diet as a means of weight reduction. The class also serves those people seeking orthopedic, neuromuscular or cardiorespiratory rehabilitation. Significant members of the class are also likely to include jogging drop-outs and frustrated aerobic dancers.

To reiterate, it should be carefully noted that the course appeals to the entire university community i.e., students as well as faculty and staff. It should therefore, be scheduled at a time to facilitate lunch hour exercise programs. Whatever the participants' motivation for enrollment in the class or their expectations of the experience, the course content and the method of presentation are key elements in satisfaction and benefits derived from the program.

SUGGESTED COURSE CONTENT AND METHODOLOGY

When designing the pace walking class, course content should reflect the following:

- course objectives
- establishing personal objectives/goals
- description of pace walking
- benefits of aerobic exercise
- selection of appropriate footwear
- stretch-out, warm-up and cool down
- monitoring the heart rate

- walking opportunities and trends
- establishing a walking program to achieve the physiological "training effect"

The last component, establishing the program to gain the "training effect" is the essence of the course. To achieve the training effect the participant should reach and maintain his/her target heart rate for a period of at least 30 minutes. This task is relatively easy for a 45 year old walker whose target heart rate is 131 beats per minute, but it is more difficult for a 20 year old to walk and reach his/her target heart rate of 150 beats/min. It is only fair to mention that because of the high target heart rate required of younger age groups some exercise physiologists are skeptical of the aerobic benefits of walking programs for young adults. There are several methods, however, in which work load can be increased to reach the target heart rate. They are as follows:

- increase the walking speed
- increase the walking time
- increase the walking incline
- add weight to the walker by using weighted backpack, chest or ankle weights (one pound on the foot is comparable to five pounds on the back.)

While there are many acceptable walking programs for class use, the author has chosen to utilize the Consumer Guide Walking Program since it is functional and simple to follow. The instructor found that starting healthy young adults at 3.75 to 4 mile per hour pace for 30 minutes was a realistic beginning. This pace and time proved challenging and provided a common denominator in adjusting the program to accommodate individual student differences.

By utilizing the previously mentioned methods of increasing work load, within a four week period of time, the majority of students were able to reach their target heart rate range. Those students who could not reach the target heart rate range within five weeks were given the option of progressing to a walk-jog program and ultimately on to a jogging program if they desired. The large majority of the students, however, chose to remain on the walking program. The seventh week walking class time was increased to 50 minutes and all students from that point on were able to reach their target heart rate on a regular basis.

Although the walking program by its very nature is challenging, a key element in student motivation is the enthusiastic participation of the instructor in class walks. This not only demonstrates a personal commitment to walking, but provides an opportunity to elicit feedback from students and encourage them in their endeavors. Class walks also afford an opportunity for faculty/student social interaction which is so often lacking in the typical university environment.

STUDENT RESPONSE

Reaction of students to the pace walking class has been very favorable and encouraging. The conscientious student who walks four times a week can make significant strides in improving his/her fitness. In addition, students perceive the walking program as satisfying and beneficial. Both of these outcomes are significant factors which should contribute to the probability that pace walking will become a life long activity for these students. Admittedly enrollment in the first pace walking class was low but class members and the instructor take pride in being charter members of a unique concept. The charter members of the class have in all actuality, acted as disciples in spreading the word about pace walking. All indications point to a significant increase in enrollment next term. The future of pace walking as a curricular offering at this university is optimistic and participation like the dollar has a "multiple effect." Watch us grow!

REFERENCES

1. Raymond Dreyfack, *The Complete Book of Walking*, Farnsworth Publishing Co., 1979.
 2. Charles T. Kuntzleman and Editors of Consumer Guide, *The Complete Book of Walking*, Pocket Books, 1982.
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COMMENTS

Decision making is a balance among information collection, planning a course of action, implementing the decision, justifying the organization, and evaluating the effectiveness of the decision. When too much or too little time is spent on one of the elements, the result is a loss in continuity and decisions that bring unneeded problems.