

Hello. This is Molly Brennan. In this installment of the podcast we're going to talk about how exercise is one of the best ways we can fight stress.

Research shows that exercise can have a major positive affect on our brains. It helps us release tension, and regular exercise can actually reduce your physical response to stress. Exercise can improve your mood, help you feel more energetic, and give you the energy we need to get through our busy days with a more positive attitude.

The good news is that you don't have to overhaul your life or your everyday routines to get more exercise. There are lots of small changes you can make, and one of the most effective is to simply start walking. Walking is an excellent way to get exercise, and it's easy. All you need to do is put on some walking shoes and head out the door!

Now you're going to hear from Dr. Miriam Nelson, author of *Strong Women Stay Young*, *Men Beat Arthritis*, and other bestsellers. Dr. Nelson believes in the power of walking and she's going to share some tips with you to help you get started with a walking program of your own.

Hi. My name is Dr. Miriam Nelson. And I'm an Associate Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University in Boston, where I do research on exercise, and nutrition, and health and longevity.

I have to say right off the bat that walking is by far my most favorite activity. It's what I like to do to relieve stress, to sort of just melt away everything that was going on in the day. I get home from a busy day at work. There's food that has to be put on the table. There is, you know, homework that has to be done. And I can tell you, I'm pretty tired. And what I sort of say to myself is, "OK. Do I want to like just chill out on the couch for about 20 minutes, and just sort of rest? Or do I want to go out for a walk? And I can tell you, sometimes when I walk in that door, and I say to myself, "The last thing I want to do is put on my walking shoes and go for a walk." But what happens is, is that I sort of restructure the way I think. So that I do put those walking shoes on, and I do go out for a walk. And maybe, it's with a friend or a partner or a spouse. But what happens is, when I go out for that walk, I come back, and I'm sort of

ready to meet the rest of the evening. And I have so much more energy. That little bit of activity sort of really is that charge that I need for the rest of the day.

### **Starting your walking program**

So what do I need to do to start walking more? This is where I want to get into some more of the particulars about starting a walking program. The first is, I really think it's important for people to figure where they are right now. The first is really to look at your baseline walking habits. So, there's two ways that you can do this.

One is you can record the number of minutes that you walk in a diary. Get just a little flip pad. And each day, write down how much you walked. And think about all of the walking that you did. The walking that you do that is planned, where you go out for exercise, and also the walking that you do for errands and getting to work, and at home. Think about all of the walking.

The other way is to get a pedometer. So, if you have a pedometer, each day at the end of the day, make sure that you wear the pedometer all day. When you first get up in the morning and then when you take it off at night, record how many steps you take on a daily basis. Do that for a week. So this is your preparation for starting your walking program. That is a great way to see where you're going to start, and what your ultimate goals are going to be.

Step two is if you aren't already reaching the goal of 30 minutes to 60 minutes a day of walking within your lifestyle and your planned activity, and if you're not reaching about 10,000 steps a day with the pedometer, then you need to think about including, try on a daily basis to get about 15 minutes more of walking within your normal day, using the strategies that we spoke about earlier in terms of at home, within your community, or at work. With the step counter, you want to try to accumulate about 2,000 steps more a day, which really isn't a lot. It's about 15 minutes more of walking a day that you're going to be accumulating, the 2,000 steps. That's what it adds up to.

I don't really care where you start. That's not what matters. What matters is that you take that willful act to start walking more. So, if you started on an average with about 4,000 steps a day - - well, let's say just 20 minutes of walking a day -- you want to add those 2,000 steps or 15 minutes, you're going to get up to 6,000 steps. Try to do that for a few more weeks, and then add a little bit more. See how it's going. And I can tell you that recording the amount of walking that you do -- whether it's with steps or with minutes -- in a diary is enormously helpful. We know that individuals that just record how much they exercise in a diary, without telling them to increase their activity, they actually just spontaneously start to exercise more. So it's a great behavioral strategy. Just keep a little, simple diary on how much you walk. It's a great way to get you going.

We know that researchers at the University of Colorado have found that 2,000 extra steps is the magic number to help prevent weight gain. It may sound like a lot. But if you track your steps with a pedometer, you'll be amazed at how quickly they really add up. So there is good evidence to try to add that 2,000 more steps a day. Remember that you also don't have to get that into one bout. You can think consciously about how to fit it into your everyday life.

All right. So here's some specific suggestions for really starting a walking program. I do want you to include more walking in your everyday life. But here's some suggestions for how to start a specific walking program.

First, commit yourself to just three times a week to walk 15 minutes each of those sessions. So, that's just for starters. That's what I want you to do.

And then over the next couple of weeks, increase that by 5 minutes each session. So, then you're walking 20 minutes three times a week. And then, over the next few weeks, really by the time you get to six or seven weeks out, a little bit over a month, we really want people to be walking about 30 minutes each session three to five times a week. So, that is the sort of standard recommendation that the public health community is giving out. I believe in it firmly. I try to follow it myself. And I try to get my children and my other loved ones to do this as

well. This is really the sort of bread and butter kinds of physical activity that's going to help you live longer and be healthier and look better.

Now, the speed at which you walk is also important. Yes, when you're doing the life kinds of activities, where you're walking to work or walking with a co-worker, things such as that, I'm not interested really in how fast you're walking. I care about how many steps you're taking and how much you're walking. But when you go out for that sort of planned walking program, it's best that you do walk at a brisk pace. The intensity should be such that, in the middle of that walk, you should feel your heart rate is pounding a little bit more than when you're resting or strolling, that your breathing is more rapid, it's not labored, but it's more rapid, that you're getting warm, that your body is warming up.

But you should always be able to carry on a conversation with someone. You shouldn't be so out of breath that you can't talk. Now, there are some safety issues here with the intensity at which you're walking. And that is that you put on your sneakers, you're going out for your walk. You don't start out at the gate going really fast. You start out warming up for five minutes, preferably at a slower pace, at a stroll. And then, over that five minutes, you're getting up to what you would call your target pace. That intensity where it is moderately hard. You're getting your heart rate up, and you're breathing more.

And then you're sustaining that intensity for -- let's say you're going out for a 30-minute walk -- so for 20 minutes you're really sustaining that intensity. And then, at the end of your walk, for five minutes, you're cooling down. So, you don't just come into the house walking briskly, and then stop and sit down at a chair. That's where you get into problems. You want to make sure that you slowly bring your heart rate back down to your baseline, that the circulation of the blood slows down again. Your heart, your breathing rate comes down. And you're back to sort of baseline.

And then, you want to do some stretching and flexibility to make sure that you maintain that flexibility. Because sometimes, a walking program can actually shorten the muscles instead of lengthen them. It's training your cardiovascular system, but it's not necessarily training for

flexibility. So you do want to make sure that you do some stretching after you finish exercising.

So just to review is, optimally, you want to warm up for about five minutes, slowly get up to snuff. Then, have a good intensity of walking for about 20 minutes where your heart rate is up, and you're breathing, and you're getting warm. And then five minutes of cool-down at the end. And then do some stretching.