

Are You Active Enough? Using a Pedometer to Measure Physical Activity

One way to ensure that you're getting enough physical activity is to measure it. A pedometer is a tool that helps you estimate the number of steps you take and is a simple way to measure your physical activity. It is also a great motivator to get you moving. Increasing your activity by walking more can help you feel better, fight weight gain and improve your overall health.

How does the pedometer work?

The pedometer is clipped to your waistband and registers each upward movement of your hips. It is very important that you attach the pedometer correctly.

1. Clip the pedometer to your belt or waistband of your clothing. It should fit snugly against your body.
2. Line the pedometer up with the center of your kneecap.
3. The pedometer should not be tilted to one side or another.
4. Set it at zero in the morning and wear it all day.
5. Record your steps at the end of the day in a Step Log.

If you find this inexpensive pedometer helpful, you may want to consider buying a higher quality model for long-term use.

How well do pedometers perform?

No pedometer is 100 percent accurate and they work differently for each person. For example, slow gaits and shuffling feet may not register easily. Pedometers that are not placed correctly on your waist may be inaccurate and riding in motor vehicles may add "steps" to your reading.

It is more important that your pedometer be consistent. If you record the number of steps you take on a typical day for several days in a row, the readings should be somewhat similar. If not, your pedometer may not be functioning correctly. So before you begin, it is a good idea to test your pedometer's accuracy and consistency.

How do I test the pedometer?

Attach the pedometer and walk around while counting 500 steps to yourself. Read the pedometer and compare it to your count to see how accurate the pedometer is. Repeat this test three times. If you get similar results each time, the pedometer is accurate and consistent.

How many steps should I take?

A recommended goal for most adults is to strive for 10,000 steps per day. This amount is likely too low for children and too high for older adults.

Some people may not be able to reach the suggested 10,000 step goal. Don't worry. It is more important that you focus on gradually increasing your activity level from what you are currently doing.

How do I set a step goal?

Wear the pedometer for one full typical week and write down the total number of steps that you've taken each day. Calculate the average number of steps taken per day. This will give you an idea of your current activity level and help you set realistic goals.

Then, over the next 4 weeks, try to increase your steps by 500 to 1,000 per day.

Use a Step Log to start recording the number of steps you accumulate each day. Tracking this can help you learn how to increase your daily steps.

How can I add steps to my day?

- Find out how many steps it takes to walk around your block, to the park or to the store.
- Use your morning or afternoon break to take a 10 minute or 1,000 step walk.
- Walk up and down the stairs or around the house during commercial breaks in television shows.
- Park at the end of the parking lot at work or at the grocery store.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Try walking instead of driving when you have small errands to do.
- Skip drive-thru windows.
- Explore parks and zoos.

What if I have diabetes?

- Talk to your doctor about using a pedometer and discuss what is the right exercise for you.
- Check your blood sugar level before and after exercising.
- Check your feet for blisters or sores before and after exercising.
- Wear the proper shoes and socks.
- Drink plenty of fluid before, during and after exercising.
- Warm up before exercising and cool down afterward.
- Have a snack close to you in case your blood sugar level drops.

| Step Log | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|--------------------|
| | Total steps from pedometer | Other physical activities not recorded on pedometer (what and for how long) | Total of other activities (15 minutes of activity = 2,000 steps) | Daily total |
| Monday | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | |
| Friday | | | | |
| Saturday | | | | |
| Sunday | | | | |
| Total for the week | | | | |