

by Susan L. Comer

# Exercise in Disguise

## How to Slip Aerobic Workouts into Your Daily Routine

**Y**ou don't have to join a gym or sweat at dawn to enjoy health benefits from exercise. Opportunities for physical activity abound wherever you are, and the time to take advantage of them is—whatever time you have! Got 10 minutes before a meeting? Then take 10 for a brisk walk through the halls. Meeting's upstairs? Even better. Climb them! And don't watch your daughter's soccer game from the sidelines. Catch a panoramic view—while you hike the field's perimeter.

### Improving the Numbers

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, people of all ages benefit from moderate physical activity, such as 30 minutes of brisk walking five or more times a week. Among others, the health benefits include a reduced risk of coronary heart disease, colon cancer and diabetes; weight loss; healthy bones, muscles and joints; even the reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression.

But while many of us realize the importance of regular cardiovascular exercise, we often struggle to schedule that half-hour block.

Improving your own numbers may be easier than you think. Kevin Burns, spokesperson for the American Council on Exercise (ACE), says “It doesn't have to be a full 30 minutes at a given time. You can do two 15-minute activities or three 10-minute activities during the day. The key is you're not on the couch watching TV. You're up and about and exercising”—and watching TV! In other words, don't make exercise a chore, but an extension of what you already do. You're more likely to stick to it and create a healthier you!

### New Attitude

At some point, you probably acquired the notion that deriving any health benefit from exercise means devoting an entire portion of your day to it. “We've trained [exercise and



health specialists] in that method for years—decades in fact,” says Ruth Ann Carpenter, a director at the Cooper Institute, a leading health and fitness research center located in Dallas. “And we pounded it into people that you had to do 20-30 minutes of vigorous activity all at once, three to five days a week. Now we have research that says it doesn't have to be done that way. There's nothing wrong with the traditional approach, other than the fact that many people can't do it.”

In 1999, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a study led by Andrea Dunn, Ph.D., of the Cooper Institute, illustrating that, for previously inactive adults, “lifestyle” physical activity was as effective as a structured exercise program for improving cardiorespiratory fitness and blood pressure. “Six months in, structured participants had

benefited more,” says Carpenter, “but after 24 months, the two groups were essentially the same.” To accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activities on most days, “lifestyle” participants did everything from playing with their kids to mowing their lawns. “Over the six months, all one gentleman did,” says Carpenter, “was walk up and down four flights of stairs, four times a day, [five days a week], and he significantly improved his fitness and reduced his weight.”

“The lifestyle approach,” says Carpenter, “provides an alternative for people who can’t go to a gym, who don’t want to go to a gym, who aren’t physically fit enough or, for health reasons, can’t do vigorous exercise.”

### Steppin’ Out

This past winter, the staff of WPSD-TV in Paducah, Kentucky, took the 10,000 Step Challenge presented by Massac Memorial Hospital in Illinois. For three months, participants wore step counters, or “pedometers,” that recorded the number of steps walked each day.

“I found myself walking to ask someone a question instead of picking up the phone,” says participant Cathy Crecelius, WPSD’s director of promotion/public affairs. “Many people in the news department were walking to lunch instead of driving.” Crecelius believes her participation in the 2002 challenge was largely responsible for the 40-point drop in her cholesterol level that occurred during the 10,000 Step Challenge.

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends 10,000 steps daily as one way to achieve better fitness and health. Consequently, 10,000 Steps programs are gaining steam nationwide.

### A Truly “Lifestyle” Approach

“As a parent, as a spouse, as an employee,” says Burns, the ACE spokesperson, “I’ve got a lot of other factors in my life tugging for my time and attention. If I can make my physical fitness activity part of what I do on an ongoing basis instead of an afterthought that has to be scheduled, I’m probably going to be more committed and more motivated and, because of that, I’ll probably achieve better results.” Burns suggests pushing a familiar weight. “When you’re done grocery shopping and just about to head into the checkout



## SEIZE THE MOMENT!

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park farther from your office and other destinations.
- With a full grocery cart, circle the store again.
- Walk briskly around the soccer field during your child’s practice.
- Need a couple items from the corner store? Walk or bike there.
- Do your own yard work.

line with your full cart,” he says, “take another lap around the perimeter of the grocery store.”

Wash your car, bike to work, walk the dog, walk from your hotel to your destination on business trips—it saves cab fares! Use a cordless headset and walk while you talk. Think it doesn’t add up? “That’s the beauty of a step counter,” says Carpenter, “because if you wear it all day long, it’ll track that extra lap around the grocery store, it’ll track going up the stairs.” And therein lies your motivation. Just make sure it’s moderate activity, the equivalent of a brisk walk. “You know,” says Carpenter, “pretend you’re late for a meeting!” ●

## STEP BY STEP

A pedometer attached to your belt or waistband is a constant reminder to keep moving! Some models have bells and whistles, but all you need is a simple step counter, which can be found in most sporting goods stores. The 10,000 steps per day recommended by the Surgeon General may seem like a lot, but with a pedometer, they all add up. Just be sure to consult with your physician before beginning a more vigorous exercise routine.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
American Council on Exercise  
Cooper Institute

Andrea L. Dunn, PhD, 1999. *Comparison of Lifestyle and Structured Interventions to Increase Physical Activity and Cardiorespiratory Fitness.* *Journal of the American Medical Association*  
U.S. Surgeon General