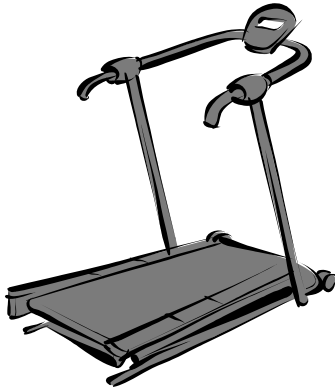


Health Fact Sheet

WALK THIS WAY FOR TRUE TREADMILL BENEFITS



Walking on a treadmill is an easy way to get an aerobic workout. It improves your circulation and balance while burning off calories and excess fat for lower cancer risk. But the secret to safe treading is to be “hands-free”.

Using a treadmill is a wonderful way to get a regular aerobic workout that is personalized to your needs. You can regulate your speed, how much time you spend walking and even whether or not you want to tread “uphill” by setting the moving track at an incline.

The advantages are many. Treadmills are used indoors, so the safety and weather hazards of walking outdoors are avoided. Their electronic screens tell you how many calories you are burning, how fast you are going and how much distance you are covering. Many offer preset programs to vary speeds and incline levels.

It’s always important to check with your doctor before starting to use a treadmill (or before starting any new exercise program). Another important fact to remember is: Try not to hold onto the handrails while you are treading, and pump your arms to keep them moving.

Avoiding a Wrenching Experience

When you’re using a treadmill, it’s easy to feel as though you need to hold on to keep from falling. Yet holding on may cause some painful problems.

Gripping handrails over stretches your back muscles and compresses your chest muscles. The result is a slumped posture. If you already have this condition, holding on while treading will make it worse. Holding on can also wrench the muscles and joints in your upper body when you grip the front bar and lean far forward, or hold on with only one hand. Your shoulder and hip joints tend to over-rotate, which can lead to repetitive stress injuries.

Holding on can lower the amount of calories you burn on a treadmill because your weight is likely to be lighter on the track. Treading with your hands off burns about

20 percent more calories, enabling better weight control and, therefore, lower risk of cancer and other diseases. Hands-free treading also avoids raising your blood pressure – which may occur if you're gripping tightly, especially at a fast speed (3.5 miles per hour or more).

Why Hands-Off Treading Makes Sense

The real world is full of uneven surfaces that you must walk on. Your brain constantly sends signals down your spinal cord to help you navigate. Sensors in your feet and legs relay nerve impulses to your brain, where they are interpreted as smooth asphalt, uneven pavement, lumpy grass, or a bed of pebbles, for example.

Holding on to the treadmill interferes with these signals, deactivating your body's balancing system and causing you to perform below your normal baseline of activity. When treading for improved health, you must perform above your baseline.

Normally, you don't hold on to anything when you walk around. Your limbs and joints work in unison to support your full weight. Even if you only hold on lightly, you take valuable work away from many muscles. Essentially, holding on mimics using a walker.

Tips for Treading Well

If you're afraid you'll lose your balance or get dizzy, slow your speed – to 2 mph, if necessary. Balancing is part of exercise and your body becomes more efficient only when challenged.

If the machine tells you to “hold on for heart rate” because it uses sensors when you grip, let go after checking your heart rate. Also, if you're holding on because “everybody else does it,” remember that popularity doesn't make it right.

Start out slowly and just let go. Concentrate on correct posture. As your body adjusts to treading hands-free, increase the speed or incline over time.