The Magic Pill

You sit down to watch the news and see a commercial for an AMAZING prescription. It has proven results for all that worries you...it:

- Reduces your risk of:
  - Heart Disease
  - Type 2 Diabetes
  - Asthma
  - Stroke
  - Breast Cancer
  - Hypertension
  - Osteoporosis
  - Dementia
  - Age-related Cataracts
  - Death

- Reduces bad cholesterol, increases good cholesterol
- Tones your arms and legs, bum and tum
- Increases energy and happiness
- Helps you maintain a healthy weight
- Increases life expectancy
- Reduces arthritis pain

Astonishingly, this prescription is absolutely free, and requires no trips to the store or special equipment. What is this magic pill you ask?......Walking.

Of course, we all know this and have heard it before. But sometimes we need to reframe the “prescription for health.” I’ve reviewed some recent studies for you and have found some new nuggets of information that may finally inspire you to walk your way to better health.

IS WALKING JUST AS GOOD AS RUNNING?

For health benefits, yes...

The key to improved cardiovascular health is calorie expenditure, regardless of how it's expended according to new research out of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The more energy walkers and runners use, the more their cardiovascular health improves. Runners aren’t healthier by virtue of being runners -- they’re just more efficient in their exercising. If you prefer walking, you can be just as well off health-wise, as runners, but you need to walk for about twice as long.

For weight-loss, not so much...
Lap for lap running burns about 2.5 more calories than walking and studies show that running significantly curbs appetite so runners are more likely to lose weight than walkers. Running is more effective than walking in preventing weight gain and achieving weight loss. Both may shed pounds, but runners lose more faster.

Verdict...

Regular cardio at any speed can help keep your body health, not to mention improve mood and energy levels. People who expend the same amount of energy (calories)—regardless of whether they were walking or running—saw the same health benefits. So, running helps you lose weight faster, but brisk walking gives you the same health benefits. In other words, someone who walks at a moderate pace enjoys the same reductions in risk as someone who runs at a vigorous pace, provided they both cover the same distance. Keep in mind that running is stressful for the body—especially over the long term.

WHAT IS A “MODERATE PACE”?

Physical activity guidelines recommend getting at least 2.5 hours a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity such as brisk walking. The easiest way to determine “brisk walking”? ...you get warm, have a slightly elevated heart rate and find yourself walking like you are late for a meeting.

For those of you who prefer numbers:
- 3 miles per hour is a “brisk” pace
- 2 miles per hour is a slow walk
- 4 miles per hour is a fast walk(almost jogging)

Using free apps such as Moves and Map my Walk can help you establish your numbers and give you helpful feedback about your daily movement habits. This information proves useful in evaluating your daily activity levels and determining your plan of action.

IS IT REALLY WORTH IT?

Numerous studies indicate that people who walk enough to meet or exceed physical activity recommendations are less likely to die early than those who only walk a little or maintain a slow pace (A Faster Stride Predicts a Longer Life). However, it is important to note that even slow walkers benefit from their efforts. According to a National Institutes of Health study, life expectancy can increase as much as 4.5 years for those who engage in “leisure-time physical activity”. Bottom line...if you already walk, try to pick up the pace. If you don’t walk, it’s never too late to start.