

Step to It! by Barb Gormley
First published in *Active Woman Canada*
(May/June 2003) © Barb Gormley

Got your pedometer yet? Across the country, walkers everywhere are clipping these little tracking devices to their waistbands and racking up the miles.

This easy-to-use gizmo is responsible for getting an entire wave of non-exercisers moving and motivating others to step up their walking habits. Simply set it to track the number of steps, kilometers, miles or calories — and hit the road.

It's not just individual walkers who are reaping the rewards. Companies and organizations are developing programs and conducting research focused on pedometer-based exercise: 3,800 employees of J.D. Irving, Limited in Atlantic Canada and Maine are using pedometers in their "Walk More in 2004" wellness campaign; "P.E.I. Stepping Out" is a 12-week program that uses pedometers and group meetings to get people more active; the City of Moncton sells pedometers to its citizens; and Kellogs has distributed 800,000 free pedometers in specially-marked boxes of its cereal.

According to Lee-Anne Kennedy of New Lifestyles Canada in Deep River, Ont., pedometers get us moving by raising our level of consciousness. By attaching a number (of steps or kilometers) to our days or individual workouts, we can make comparisons and challenge ourselves to match or beat a previous total. Consciously adding extra exercise — like walking instead of driving to the bank or parking further out at the shopping mall — can significantly affect a day's step total. And little things add up. The pedometer reinforces that every extra step taken helps increase your activity level and ultimately improves your health.

Walking 10,000 steps per day has been cited as a standard target, but Kennedy believes this to be too lofty a goal for the inactive. (She estimates that the average non-exerciser walks 3,000 to 4,000 steps per day.) Kennedy suggests that working to increase your current activity level by 500 steps is a good place to start. And don't worry about speed. Simply being more active can have a significant impact on your health.

For more information on pedometers and walking, visit www.canadaonthemove.ca, a new national research endeavor organized by the [Canadian Institutes of Health Research](http://www.cihr.ca) (CIHR). Canada on the Move is tracking the impact of pedometers on health and encourages you to visit their website and "donate your steps to research."

Pedometers start at about \$25.00 and are available at sporting goods stores, some electronics retailers and www.stepscount.com.

Sad Stat

Despite the fact that walking is considered to be one of the easiest ways to add physical activity to your day, 54% of Canadians walk less than 15 to 20 minutes a day (about 2,000 steps) according to a recent poll.