

Health Benefits of Hiking

Hiking is more than just fun. It's good for you, too!

Countless studies and research have consistently shown that regular exercise not only improves our overall health and fitness, but lengthens and improves the quality of our lives. Regular physical activity substantially reduces the risk of dying of coronary heart disease, and decreases the risk for colon cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It also helps to control weight; contributes to healthy bones, muscles, and joints; helps to relieve the pain of arthritis; reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression; and is associated with fewer hospitalizations and physician visits.

Walking is one of the lowest impact sports around. This means that while you derive all the cardiovascular benefits of other aerobic activities, you do so with a minimum of stress, strain and pounding to your body.

Here are a few ways that hiking can reduce the risk of various health issues:

Heart Disease.

According to a study done for the American Heart Association, 631,636 died from heart disease in 2006. Another study estimates that heart disease will cost the nation \$316.4 billion in terms of treatment, medication, and lost productivity¹. The results of 43 separate studies by The Centers for Disease Control showed that by exercising, individuals significantly reduce their chances for heart problems, while those who do not exercise are twice as likely to have coronary heart disease.

Hypertension

Nearly one third of American adults have high blood pressure. Hypertension is often referred to as the silent killer since symptoms are often undetectable and it can lead to heart attack, stroke, and other serious problems.

Physical activity such as hiking lowers blood pressure 4-10 points and regaining a normal body weight can lower it 5-20 points.²

Diabetes

The number of Americans with diabetes is up almost 50 percent from 1983. According to Richard Eastman of the Diabetes Institute, this increase is caused by, among other things, increased rates of obesity and a lack of physical activity.



¹ Lloyd-Jones D, Adams RJ, Brown TM, et al. [Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics—2010 Update. A Report from the American Heart Association Statistics Committee and Stroke Statistics Subcommittee.](#) *Circulation*. 2010;121:e1-e170

² National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. *The Seventh Report on the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure.* <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/hypertension/express.pdf>. Dec. 2003

For a person who has Type I (insulin-dependent) diabetes, walking can reduce the amount of insulin the person needs. A person with Type II (non-insulin dependent) diabetes can actually reverse the course of the disease through diet, exercise and weight loss.

Obesity

Like all forms of exercise, hiking is one of the best ways to lose weight and is a method of stabilizing cholesterol levels. On average, you burn 100 calories for every mile you walk. Another way to look at it is in terms of how quickly you are walking. You burn about 200 to 250 calories per hour if you're walking at a rate of 2.5 miles an hour. (That's a 24-minute mile-about the pace you'd walk getting from one place to another). You burn about 500 calories per hour if you're walking at a rate of 4.5 miles per hour. (That's just over a 13-minute mile-a pace that many novice runners maintain).

People who lose weight through hiking or walking maintain the loss and continue to lose while those who lose through dieting tend to gain weight again quickly.

Anxiety

If adrenaline, which is produced by the body to cope with real or perceived danger, isn't released from the body, it accumulates, causing muscle tension and feelings of anxiety. Walking releases this adrenaline. Results showed immediate decreases in tension and anxiety after walking, regardless of how fast or slow the participants walked.

Endorphins released by your body during a walking workout can lift your spirits and keep them there throughout the day or night – keeping your brain as healthy as your body.

Osteoporosis and Arthritis

Hiking and walking help reverse the negative effects of osteoporosis by increasing the bone density and slowing the rate of calcium loss, thus strengthening the bones and decreasing their susceptibility to break.

The University of Washington found that women with osteoporosis who walked for one hour three days per week increased their bone density in the spine and other parts of the body by 6 percent over a nine-month period.

Walking is a weight-bearing exercise. Just by walking with good posture, muscles and bones are strengthened.