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Popularity of walking surges as an alternative to running

By Randy Elliott
Of the Emerald

Jogging is not necessarily for everyone, according to Gary Klug, associate professor of physical education at the University.

"It is extremely common for people to experience pain while running," he said, "and that kind of pain is not a trivial thing. The body's joints experience severe stress when a person runs, and over time this can result in significant injury, typically involving the knees and lower legs.

But there is an alternative to running that will avoid the pain and can still result in a significant cardiovascular workout: walking.

The popularity of walking as an alternative to running has surged in the last few years, according to Dr. Rex Smith, a Eugene podiatrist.

"Many people are walking for exercise now and a couple of

'For cardiovascular fitness, anything that elevates the heart rate and sustains it over a long enough period of time is good for you.'

— Gary Klug

magazines are now being published devoted exclusively to walking," he said.

"It all depends on where people start in their fitness program and what they want out of it," said Klug. "Walking is usually prescribed for someone who has been relatively sedentary in the past and who would be in a high-risk category in a more demanding activity, or as a rehabilitation program for some type of orthopedic injury."

If cardiovascular conditioning is the goal, a walking program would be questionable for

someone who is reasonably well trained, he said, because it probably would not place a sufficient load on the cardiovascular system to result in any gain in oxygen delivery; however, if weight reduction is the goal, walking would be very beneficial, since it does expend calories.

Klug suggests people try to maximize their success by choosing a form of exercise that is enjoyable.

"Very often, people make too much out of what kind of exercise to do," he said.

There are three important considerations in any fitness program, he said: how much of a load is placed on the cardiovascular system, how often it is done, how long the activity is sustained.

"For cardiovascular fitness, anything that elevates the heart rate and sustains it over a long enough period of time is good for you," Klug said.

Whether one chooses walking or running as the vehicle to increased fitness, shoes are an important consideration.

According to Smith, shoe manufacturers have developed some definite improvements in the functional design of their products.

"There's a big difference between walking shoes and running shoes, basically in the areas of support and shock absorption," he said. "The appropriate choice of a walking shoe will depend on the individual's particular foot structure. But in general, if you have a high arch, you'll need a shoe with a lot of cushion. If you have a flat arch, you'll need more support, and if you have an average foot, you'll need something somewhere in the middle."

But, Smith added, the most important consideration in choosing any shoe is comfort.

"If it doesn't feel right when you try it on, try another pair," he said.

According to Kim Terrell, a medical assistant at the Sports Injuries and Running Clinic of Eugene, walking shoe technology is still in its infancy.

"What a salesman may tell you about a particular pair of shoes may not be scientifically accepted," she said.



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