

Jumpstart your weight loss with activity

**“Moving Grays Harbor”
By Maryann Welch**

Do you want to drop a few pounds? According to a recent study, two-thirds of Grays Harbor adults need to lose weight.

Exercise can help in many ways.

In last week’s column our county’s health officer Dr. John Bausher talked about the host of health benefits that come from becoming more active, even if you don’t lose weight.

An active person of any weight is much healthier than an inactive person of the same weight, Dr. Bausher explained.

However, if you’re overweight, losing weight is also, of course, very beneficial to your health, he said.

Today I’ll discuss how you could jumpstart your weight-loss efforts by becoming more active.

The benefits begin immediately

Unhealthy behavior can quickly become a vicious cycle. Perhaps it starts with inactivity and overeating. That leads to low-energy and discouragement. Which can lead to depression or at least dismay, which can then lead to more overeating and sitting around.

The good news is that the unhealthy cycle can be reversed with just a little effort.

“I know it’s hard to get started but when you do it, it feels good,” Dr. Bausher said. “Regardless of the quantity of activity you will begin to feel better, sleep better and have a better sense of well being.”

So, let’s take a look at how you can reverse that negative cycle to your advantage.

Today you decide you need to make a journey toward better health. You know that walking is a good way to start so you put on your tennis shoes and enjoy a 20-minute walk around the neighborhood.

Your heart is pumping, your circulation is going, your mood is lifting and you begin to feel less stressed. Maybe you even go with your spouse, child or friend and have a good visit.

When you’re done, you’re thirsty so you have a nice cold glass of water. That, plus the movement improves your digestion, making you feel less sluggish.

That afternoon you feel a little up and energetic – no need to reach for something sweet or caffeinated to give you a burst of energy. That night you sleep better because of your little walk and the next morning you wake up more rested and less likely to grab for quick energy or fast food to get you going.

Dr. Bausher says if you continue walking for a week, you’ll definitely notice your stress reducing and your mood boosting. That may give you hope to take a look at some of those eating habits, or even to increase your walking and other activity.

Besides, you’re beginning to build muscle. So, even if you don’t lose weight right away, if you keep up the walking habit, not only will you burn those extra calories during your walk, you will begin to burn more calories 24 hours a day, due to greater muscle mass. (Muscles burn more calories than fat does.)

Also, with this new way to help relieve stress and tension, you’re less likely to use food to help you relax.

And, now that you’re beginning to feel better about yourself, those “poor me” food binges or couch potato nights lessen.

As you begin to lose a pound or five, add muscle tone and increase your

endurance, exercise will become easier and you'll find yourself taking more opportunities to walk or take the stairs.

And the positive cycle continues. Remember, it just started with a walk.

This week's challenge

Time yourself taking a walk in a place where you regularly or at least occasionally walk. Note exactly where you begin and end; you may even want to record how you feel after the walk. Then make a daily walking (or other activity) plan that adds up to 30 minutes a day and stick with it. In a few weeks we'll challenge you to time yourself again on this test walk. You'll be guaranteed some improvements if you stick with your exercise plan.

Mark your calendar

- **Saturday, April 22** – Volunteers are needed to clean up the beach. Get some exercise and do some community service as well. The 7th annual clean-up stretches from Long Beach to Hobuck Beach on the Makah Reservation. For more information, call Jan Klippert at (206) 364-2689 or check out www.olympiccoastcleanup.us
- Can't make it to the beach? How about doing a clean up in your own neighborhood. Grab a trash bag and some gloves and walk around your neighborhood.

Maryann Welch is the director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.