

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Let's All Go Outside And Take A Walk!

from the American Counseling Association

Looked outside lately? Yes, that's sunshine and warm weather -- a perfect time to get out and get moving. Yes, we know you've heard it before. And yes, we know you're realize you should be moving more, and you've meant to get started. Well, maybe these facts can help motivate you.

First, let's make clear that being sedentary isn't all your fault. Today's world is full of things that make life easier and have reduced physical work.

Take that job of being a homemaker. One British study found that in the early 1950's the average woman burned more than 1,000 calories a day working around the house. Today that number has shrunk to about 550 calories a day. Thank you robot floor vacuums, clothes dryers and all our other work-saving appliances. Outside the house? Sitting in front of that computer doesn't burn many calories.

At the same time it's estimated that the number of calories we eat has increased considerably. Blame it on packaged and processed foods, all those fast food restaurant choices, and the fact that we eat out more these days. In 1970 it was estimated that Americans ate an average of about 2,150 calories each day. Today that number is up to 2,760.

So fewer calories burned but more calories consumed? That might have something to do with the weight and health issues so many of us are facing. So what's the cure?

Eating smarter and healthier is a big part of the answer. Sometimes that means choosing a salad over a burger. Sometimes it means declining that second helping or some dessert.

But to make a real difference, an exercise program should also be part of every person's life. Exercise and the calories it burns certainly helps in weight control, but also supplies many other benefits.

Regular exercise has been shown to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers, high blood pressure and several other health issues.

We professional counselors recommend it for the mental health benefits it brings. Regular exercise has been shown to help overcome depression, increase self-esteem, reduce stress and anxiety, and even improve memory and overall thinking.

So take advantage of this summer weather. And it's not necessary to become a gym rat. Even a ten minute walk every day can surprise you with the benefits it can bring.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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