



Control blood sugar, 10,000 steps at a time

I read about a recent study that said walking 10,000 steps a day could help people manage blood sugar. Is it because walking that much helps you lose weight, or is it the exercise itself that is helpful?

The researchers in that study, conducted in Australia between 2000 and 2005 and published earlier this month in the medical journal *BMJ*, suggested that most of the positive effect that walking 10,000 steps a day had on blood sugar was likely due to the weight loss that resulted. The results were promising: The researchers said that a sedentary person who changes his or her behavior over the course of five years to regularly walk 10,000 steps a day would have a threefold improvement in insulin sensitivity compared with someone who walked 3,000 steps a day five days a week. They said the effect on blood sugar had more to do with lower body mass index than the exercise itself.

It's important to note that the participants in this study did not have diabetes. The authors concluded that encouraging more healthy adults to walk 10,000 steps a day could reduce insulin resistance, a precursor of the condition, and help prevent the onset of diabetes.

But you're right, regular moderate exercise itself is an important component in blood sugar control,

especially for people who have type 2 diabetes — the kind of diabetes in which your body makes insulin but doesn't use it effectively. Moderate exercise, such as walking, encourages muscles to use the glucose in your bloodstream as energy, thus reducing your blood sugar level. Getting regular exercise also appears to increase your muscle cells' insulin sensitivity, or their ability to take glucose from the bloodstream.

Other studies have suggested that strength training could also be helpful, especially in combination with aerobic exercise. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in November found that participants who combined walking on a treadmill with twice-a-week resistance training sessions on weight machines were able to reduce their medication levels and had better blood sugar control than participants who did only one type of exercise or none at all. All of the participants had type 2 diabetes.

Obviously, it's important for everyone, and especially people with blood sugar problems, to get regular exercise. But if you do have diabetes, be sure to consult with a health professional. Short bursts of intense exercise could actually increase your blood sugar levels, so it's important to know when it's best to test your blood sugar when you exercise.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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**For the week of
Feb. 6, 2011**

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