

HEALTHY LIVING
 Is fungal meningitis also caused by HIV?
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ASK THE DOCTOR
 What causes babies to be born with small ears?
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Walking helps lower blood pressure and boost circulation

had improved. Encouraged, she paid more attention to her meals, cutting down on sugary drinks and late-night snacks. She did not follow a strict diet—just mindful eating paired with daily walking.

By six months, Olupot had lost 12kg. Friends began asking what gym she attended and she laughed when she told them her secret was simply walking. Her blood pressure improved, her knee pain reduced, and she slept better at night. Walking had not only changed her body but also her mindset. She felt disciplined, confident, and proud of herself.

Today, Olupot still walks five days a week. She says the biggest lesson she learned is that weight loss doesn't always require complicated programmes or expensive equipment. Sometimes, steady steps taken consistently can lead to life-changing results.

EXPERTS WEIGH IN

According to Dr Peter Lwabi, a senior consultant cardiologist at the Uganda Heart Institute, walking is a low-intensity exercise that plays a key role in burning harmful fat deposits that clog the body system.

"When you walk regularly, you burn fat that has accumulated around your internal organs like the heart," notes Lwabi, who also serves as the deputy executive director at the Uganda Heart Institute.

He encourages people to walk at a brisk pace for at least 150 minutes per week, explaining that this duration offers significant low-impact health benefits. "For instance, brisk walking aids weight loss and improves blood flow to the vessels around the heart. If there are any vessels that have already narrowed, walking regularly will help the growth of new vessels around the blockages," he says.

Lwabi further explains that walking helps lower blood pressure and boost circulation. "When you walk, the blood vessels open up (dilate) and become more elastic, allowing blood to flow smoothly and the pressure to come down. This applies to everyone — you do not have to wait until you develop hypertension or diabetes before you start walking," he adds.

He notes that conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and excessive weight gain are largely triggered by a sedentary lifestyle or lack of physical activity. Beyond cardiovascular health, experts also point out that walking delivers a range of additional benefits,

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When Mary Olupot turned 42, she barely recognised herself in the mirror. Long hours at a desk job, family responsibilities and the habit of "eating on the go" had slowly added weight over the years. Gyms felt intimidating, expensive, and unrealistic for her schedule. One evening, after struggling to climb a short hill near her home, Olupot made a simple decision: she would start walking.

She began modestly; just 15

minutes every morning around her neighbourhood. At first, Olupot felt slow and out of breath, but she stayed consistent. Within a few weeks, the walks became easier and she extended them to 30 minutes.

Olupot then started choosing longer routes, sometimes walking to the market instead of driving. Walking gradually became her quiet time—an opportunity to think, pray, and decompress.

After two months, Olupot noticed her clothes fitting more loosely. The scale showed she had lost 4kg, but more importantly, her energy levels

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including improved sleep quality. On this note, fitness coach Alex Barungi observes that people who walk regularly tend to fall asleep faster and enjoy deeper sleep. "Better sleep supports emotional regulation, concentration, and resilience to daily stressors," Barungi says.

Beyond sleep and heart health, walking also has a direct impact on muscle strength and joint function. Dr Susan Akori, a physiotherapist at Specialized Women and Neonatal Hospital Mulago, explains that regular walking tones the leg and abdominal muscles – and even the arm muscles when they are actively pumped during movement. This, she says, increases range of motion by shifting pressure and weight from the joints to the muscles.

She further notes that as muscles continuously contract and relax during brisk walking, they become stronger and increase in bulk. "For instance, the muscles of an individual who does not walk or engage in any form of regular exercise tend to be atrophy compared to those who do," Akori explains.

She adds that walking improves joint flexibility and is especially beneficial for people battling arthritis. Expanding on musculoskeletal benefits, orthopaedic surgeon Dr Gerald Naddumba notes that walking is also linked to improved joint health. "Walking involves a wide range of motions, including flexion, extension, rotation, and lateral bending. Consequently, this improves flexibility of the lower joints, reducing stiffness and lowering the risk of disc degeneration," he

WALKING: THE EVERYDAY MIRACLE

WALKING TIPS

- **Walk at the right pace.** This means faster than normal, but still being able to talk in short sentences. Maintain good posture by keeping your head up and eyes looking forward.
- **Engage your core muscles.** Stand tall as if a string is pulling you upward. Good posture improves breathing and prevents back and neck strain.
- **Warm up and cool down.**
- **Be consistent, and do not go to extremes.** Aim for 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days a week, or break it into shorter sessions (e.g., two 15-minute walks). Consistency matters more than speed.
- **Wear proper footwear.** Choose comfortable walking shoes with good cushioning and support.
- **Stay hydrated by taking water before and after your walk.**
- **Make it enjoyable by walking with a friend, join a walking group, listen to music, or explore new routes.** Enjoyment helps you stay consistent.

explains.

Naddumba further highlights that walking increases bone density. "As you walk, you are bearing weight



Walking improves joint flexibility and is especially beneficial for people battling arthritis

and depositing more calcium on your bones," he says.

THE MENTAL HEALTH ASPECT
Beyond physical well-being, consistent walking is widely

recognised for its positive impact on mental health. It stimulates the release of endorphins, serotonin, and dopamine – neurotransmitters that improve mood, reduce stress, and promote a sense of calm.

Rogers Mubiru, a clinical psychiatrist based in Kampala, notes that regular walking has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety and mild to moderate depression, sometimes as effectively as medication for some individuals.

Adding a broader psychosocial perspective, Derrick Kizza Mbuga, executive director of Mental Health Uganda, says consistent walking creates structure in daily life. "This sense of routine and accomplishment – even from something as simple as completing a walk – can significantly improve self-esteem and motivation, especially during stressful periods," he notes. Mbuga also points out that walking often encourages social interaction, as people meet others along the way or join walking groups. This, he says, helps reduce loneliness, which is vital for mental well-being. Importantly, regular walking also builds long-term resilience. "It strengthens the brain's ability to cope with stress. Walkers often report feeling more emotionally stable, hopeful, and confident," he adds.

WALKING DURATION

Brisk walking is among the physical

fitness activities recommended by World Health Organisation (WHO). The recommended physical activity translates to about 150 minutes a week. You can spread out the time and choose to walk for 30 minutes in a day for five days.

According to Lwabi, a good brisk walk should last about 40 minutes, this is about four times in a week, hence totalling to about 160 minutes of walking in a week.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO WALK?

Lwabi is against walking when it is extremely cold or hot. He recommends walking early in the morning (between 5:00am to 7:00am) or sometime in the evening. "This is because walking in excessive temperatures tends to stress the body," he explains.

He is quick to note that the only limitation lies in Uganda's poorly designed roads that do not have walking areas to encourage people to walk. "Yet, it is much cheaper to build structures for walking than to treat patients with high blood pressure given that treatment is for life." He also faults bodaboda cyclists who ride on walk ways in the heat of heavy traffic.

In the same breath, the executive director Uganda Heart Institute Dr John Omagino, the executive director at Uganda Heart Institute, urges government to construct roads with space for walking.