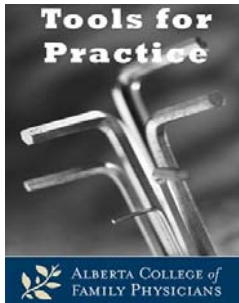


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Motivating Patients to Move: A Light at the End of the Couch?

Clinical Question:

How do I motivate my patients to participate in regular physical activity?

Evidence:

- A 2007 systematic review (26 studies, 2767 pts) assessed the use of pedometers to increase physical activity levels and improve health.
 - Pedometers were found to significantly increase physical activity (2000-2400 steps/day)¹
 - An important predictor of increased activity was the presence of a “step goal” (Working up to 10 000 steps/d was commonly recommended)
 - The mean intervention duration using pedometers was 18 weeks; there is no conclusive evidence of long term effect.
- Providing patients with a written, goal oriented exercise program has been previously demonstrated to increase physical activity levels.²

Context:

- Multiple studies show increased activity reduces mortality. Two examples are:
 - A prospective cohort study (250,000 pts) found regular moderate activity (e.g. brisk walking ≥ 30 minutes most days) is associated with 27% relative decrease in overall mortality compared to no activity, irrespective of BMI or other risk factors.³
 - Regular vigorous activity reduced mortality 50%.³
 - A cohort of almost 10,000 men (mean age 43) followed for 5 years found mortality rates of active men were one third that of inactive men (40/10,000 patient years versus 122/10,000 patient years, respectively).⁴
- Pedometers can aid in motivating activity and a simple prescription goal can be helpful. A sample “prescription” for activity with a pedometer might be:
 1. Wear your pedometer every day for one week.
 2. Calculate your daily steps (feel free to average to the closest 1000 increment).

3. Add 500 steps per day to your daily average. Walk that each day for the next week.
4. Repeat step 3, adding 500 steps to last week's daily goal and walk that each day for the next week.
5. Continue to your target of 10,000 steps per day.

Bottom-line: Pedometers, used with specific exercise goals, provide an inexpensive, tangible measure of a patient's physical activity, and have been demonstrated to increase physical activity levels - at least in the short term.

Authors: Christina Korownyk MD, CCFP & G. Michael Allan MD, CCFP

1. [JAMA. 2007;298\(19\):2296-2304.](#)
2. [Am J Public Health. 1998;88\(2\):288-91.](#)
3. [Arch Intern Med. 2007;167\(22\):2453-246.](#)
4. [JAMA 1995; 273 \(14\): 1093-8. 2.](#)

Tools for Practice is a biweekly article summarizing medical evidence with a focus on topical issues and practice modifying information. It is coordinated by G. Michael Allan, MD, CCFP and the content is written by practising family physicians. Archived articles are available on the Toward Optimized Practice website.

This communication reflects the opinion of the author and does not necessarily mirror the perspective and policy of the Alberta College of Family Physicians.