

# Healthy Living



## Walking: Therapy for Mind and Body

"I love to talk about walking. You can drastically improve your body's health by walking. It should be a staple for wholehearted living," says ACA member Kelli Pearson, DC, who practices in Spokane, Wash.

She recalls a middle-aged couple who found themselves exhausted, 90 pounds overweight, and hopeless. "The wife found some old tennis shoes and grabbed her husband's hand, and day after day, they walked together. The first day, they marched one block. But slowly over three months, they were walking one hour a day." By the end of the year, each had lost weight and significantly improved their health and stamina.

"Don't doubt that doing the right thing, day after day, will make a difference!" she adds.

When coaching her patients on how to have good form and a positive experience on their walks, Dr. Pearson offers four basic concepts—and a catchy mantra to remember them. Use her tips to get started on your walking regimen today:



### Heel-Toe

When you're walking, focus on the heel and then toe contact as you stride forward, thinking of maximally bending the ankle of the foot in the back. Your mantra when you're walking will include four statements, the first of which is "heel-toe."

Second, though maybe just as important as the first point, is that when you walk, you must be pushing yourself forward, rather than what most of us do—fall forward. If you are watching a jogger or sprinter, you will see that they are leaning forward, recognizing a fall isn't forthcoming because a runner's feet are quickly going to be back underneath them. However, when you are walking, you should be able to maintain an erect posture and be propelled forward by the strength of your gluteal muscles. Your butt becomes your engine.



### Glutes Go

When walking, you want to feel your butt muscles contract. As you propel yourself forward, try to feel your gluteal muscle on the right side while you are reaching out with your left leg. If it were not for your right gluteal, you wouldn't have the power to propel yourself forward in the first place. Instead of those muscles going along for the ride, you should feel them tighten and contract as the pushing motor takes charge. Getting your butt in gear is a win-win situation, as strong gluteal muscles allow robust locomotion, but they also protect the lower back and hips from injury. More importantly, this will enable you to walk upright and not let gravity get the best of you. So as you walk, you will add two more words to your walking mantra: "Glutes go."



### Lead with Your Heart

The third point is my absolute favorite, and that is the concept of "leading with your heart." By that, I mean your heart should be the first thing that enters the room—most importantly, in front of your head. Think about lifting your chest toward the sky a little bit and then entering the room with your heart first. Not only will you have better posture, but you will be standing straighter, energetically, and something beautiful will happen in the room.





## Arms Apart

The fourth concept focuses on the connection between your legs and arms. If you are an elite sprinter, you pay very close attention to how your arm moves with your opposite leg. Likewise, when you are walking and you step forward with your left leg, your left arm should automatically swing behind you, and the converse is true. This focus improves your ability to maintain an upright position, makes it easier to land on your heel and push forward by contracting your gluteals, and increases the fluidity of your shoulder girdle.

Mostly, you want to be able to rotate around your thoracic spine as your arms swing back and forth; walking becomes a rotational exercise to enliven the thoracic spine. Our challenge is we often have lots of stuff in our hands, so our arms can't swing, or one hand is holding the cell phone to the ear and the other hand is stuffed in the pocket. We are just not moving our arms and shoulders, but our heads are facing down, so the heart passes the threshold in second place. Because we tend to be ahead of our center gravity, we are falling forward and not using our gluteal muscles. The heel-toe phenomenon gets ignored, and we end up plodding hard with the heel and toe, creating foot and knee pain to boot. So the last piece of information that you keep in mind with walking is "arms apart."



### Walking Mantra

The walking mantra has a little rhyme to it for easier use: HGLA—"Heel-toe...glutes go...leading heart... arms apart!"

"If you follow this mantra, when you come back from your walk you will likely have a sense of possibility, and even a bit more peace that probably did not exist before the walk," says Dr. Pearson. "I love walking alone, as I feel like I'm meditating, releasing crazy thoughts, imagining my next steps in life, taking the time to hear my solutions, or remembering to be thankful."

#### About Dr. Kelli Pearson

Dr. Kelli Pearson is an ACA member and the author of "Eight Minutes to Ageless: The Manual on Maturing That You've Never Read—but It's Not Too Late." She has been a chiropractic physician for nearly four decades. Her mission as a health care provider is to figure out how to provide the right care at the right time.



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