

# Watch Your Steps

A good pedometer adds modern efficiency to the oldest exercise around **BY CHARLES PASSY**

**B**efore there were treadmills, elliptical machines, ergometers and Ab Scissors, there was walking. And in the 2 million years since *Homo erectus* started humankind ambulating without the aid of knuckles, putting one foot in front of the other has established itself as more than just a fitness fad. Some 54 million people walk as exercise today, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, and no wonder. It requires

merely the oomph to get off the couch and the wherewithal to buy a good pair of sneakers.

You can make your strolling a bit more purposeful, however, by adding a pedometer to your walking gear. In the past several years, health and fitness experts, including the former surgeon general, C. Everett Koop, have made the case that 10,000 steps daily, the equivalent of five miles, is the right

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

Omron's Pocket Pedometer HJ-720ITC is a great tool for walkers because it's:

- ▶ Relatively accurate and performed well without a lot of repositioning
- ▶ Easy to attach to clothing but also works carried inside a pocket
- ▶ Full of features, like a seven-day progress log and a USB hookup

goal for achieving lower blood pressure, better glucose control, a healthier heart and a trimmer physique. "We've found that people going about their everyday activities take 6,000 steps, and another 4,000 is the equivalent of adding two miles, or another 35 minutes, consistent with recommendations by the






American College of Sports Medicine," says Dixie L. Thompson, a professor of exercise physiology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

A pedometer can spur you to reach that goal. These devices detect body motion and record each step. Some use a spring-levered mechanism that swings like a pendulum and clicks for every step; others, called accelerometers, use sensors that translate movement into electrical charges. For as little as \$8, you can get one that measures distance walked and calories burned. More advanced ones—generally those \$30 and up—may come with extras like a heart-rate monitor, a radio or a memory that tracks progress over time.

At the minimum you want an easy-to-read display and a clip strong enough to hold on tight (most pedometers attach to the waistband). Careful: There are many inaccurate models on the market, some miscounting steps by as much as 40%. (Those we tested, however, were all within 6% of the correct count.) Thompson advises buying from a store with a generous return policy, taking the unit home and testing it by walking 100 steps. If it's off by more than five, or 5%, try repositioning it, since a pedometer's angle or proximity to your waist sometimes makes a difference. If it still doesn't deliver 95% correct results, try another model.

Whichever kind you choose, your new pedometer can help you step up your workout. "Setting goals and self-monitoring can really help change your behavior," says Thompson. "With a pedometer, you'll know how close you are to your goal, and maybe it'll motivate you to take a walk at lunch." \$

**How we did it** Since weight affects performance, we had both a heavyset male and a petite female use five widely available pedometers on different surfaces and at varying speeds. To test accuracy, our subjects walked 100 paces on flat ground three times. To test ease of use, they sauntered, strolled and stepped until they were blistered, achy and ready for a nap.

Pedometer	What It Measures	Additional Features	Accuracy	The Pluses and Minuses
 <p><b>Omron Pocket HJ-720ITC</b> \$50</p> <p><b>Money FIELD TEST WINNER</b> 07.07 Magazine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steps (including faster-paced "aerobic" steps)</li> <li>Calories</li> <li>Distance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can upload your results to your computer to track long-term progress; USB cable and software included.</li> <li>Unit stores 42 days of data.</li> </ul>	<p><b>99.3%</b></p> <p>Delivered good results from the very beginning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large display; strong clip; unit works in pocket or purse.</li> <li>To start at zero in the middle of a day, you must reset—and lose stored data.</li> </ul> <p><b>A-</b></p>
 <p><b>Oregon Scientific PE823</b> \$20</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steps</li> <li>Calories</li> <li>Distance</li> <li>Time elapsed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can plug in a step, distance or calorie goal and get a beep when you reach it.</li> <li>Unit stores seven days of data.</li> </ul>	<p><b>99%</b></p> <p>Took some repositioning to get it counting right, but then didn't waver much</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very compact size; "gripper" teeth on clip ensure unit stays securely attached.</li> <li>Screen is hard to read; function buttons are too small.</li> </ul> <p><b>B+</b></p>
 <p><b>New Balance VIA Wrist Pedometer by Highgear</b> \$60</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steps</li> <li>Calories</li> <li>Distance</li> <li>Time elapsed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A backlit display makes the unit more readable at night.</li> </ul>	<p><b>97.3%</b></p> <p>(99% when the subject didn't scratch his head)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wristband style is easier to use than waist clip.</li> <li>Accurate so long as you're not moving your arm too much</li> </ul> <p><b>B-</b></p>
 <p><b>Walk4Life WFL Elite</b> \$29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steps</li> <li>Calories</li> <li>Distance</li> <li>Time elapsed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The warranty (five years) is longer than you'll find on most pedometers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>98.7%</b></p> <p>Had to play around with its placement to get the step count going right</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compact size</li> <li>Flip-down display is often difficult to flip; unit must be closed to function properly when you walk.</li> </ul> <p><b>C+</b></p>
 <p><b>New Lifestyles NL-2000 Activity Monitor</b> \$60</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steps</li> <li>Calories (both "activity" and total)</li> <li>Metabolic rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Calculates metabolic rate—or the calories you expend at rest—using your weight, age, gender and height</li> <li>Unit stores seven days of data.</li> </ul>	<p><b>94.4%</b></p> <p>Despite other positive reviews, this proved too sensitive in our test, and it overcounted more than any other.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designed to work on overweight people with minimum repositioning</li> <li>Certain movements, like opening it, add steps to the count.</li> </ul> <p><b>C-</b></p>