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Walking

Stretch can help prevent major injuries

By Megan Swoyer/ *Special to The Detroit News*

Most fitness experts advise walkers to stretch before beginning a walkathon. But Joe Roczniak stresses that stretching after a walk is "just as important, if not more important."

Roczniak, 30, a fitness specialist at the Oakland Athletic Club in Birmingham, offers several tips for those who want to get into a walking program or who are planning to participate in any of the increasingly popular walks-for-a-cause, including Saturday's City of Hope walk for cancer at Metro Beach Metropark near Mt. Clemens.

"If you're just starting in the sport of walking, be sure you have good shoes," says Roczniak, adding that you can tell right away if your shoes are appropriate by looking to see if the soles are worn. "You can warm up for a walkathon by starting slowly and then gradually increasing your speed. "Plus, do something before you take the first step to get blood flowing and calves stretched."

Roczniak recommends putting the toes of one foot against a wall, 12 inches off the ground. Put your other foot flat behind it a few feet and your hands and arms up against the wall. Then lift your knee (the one that's raised and has foot against wall) until your other calf begins to stretch. Change sides and repeat a few times. "High-marching to get your blood flowing works well, too," he says.

But stretching after you walk for a length of time is even more important, Roczniak says. "You have all these tense muscles and shins can get sore, too." To combat soreness, put toes on curb and heel on around to stretch.

...senses, put toes on cars and feet on ground to exert...
Also, pretend that you're trying to grasp and lift marbles from the ground with your toes.

Once you've been in a few walkathons, it's tempting to become a regular walker, as it's one of the easiest and most convenient ways to improve your fitness level and prevent heart disease. If you've never done this, first find out what your target heart rate is, explains Roczniaak. For example, if you're 25 years old, you would subtract 25 from 220 to get a maximum heart rate of 195. "But you should never go at your max," says Roczniaak. "We recommend 60 to 80 percent of your max. And start out even lower until you become a regular walker."

Beginner walkers also should remember that their goals should not be based on distance, but rather on duration. "I recommend for beginners to warm up for five minutes, then walk for 15 to 20 and then cool down for five."

Health and Fitness Expo

When: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Ontario Room at the Renaissance Center Marriott, Detroit.

Features: Sixty-two booths plus fitness merchandise and exhibits. Included will be a runner's clinic Saturday afternoon.

Speakers Saturday: 1 p.m., Jeff Martin, professor of exercise and sports psychology at Wayne State; 2 p.m., Dr. Owen Anderson, editor of Run-ning Research News; 3 p.m., Ann Audain, New Zealand Olympian and former 5K record holder; 4 p.m., Hal Higdon, senior writer for Runner's World; 5 p.m., Ed Eyestone, two-time Olympic marathoner.

Cost: Admission to the expo and the runner's clinic is free.