

Great fitness begins with a walk: Walking is an ideal form of exercise for many reasons. You don't need special equipment to do it, it can be done by almost anyone, and you can do it almost anywhere! As an added bonus, there are numerous health benefits from starting a regular walking program:

- **Good for your heart:** Walking regularly can result in a reduction of high blood pressure and high cholesterol, both of which contribute to heart disease.
- **Improves balance:** This can help lower your risk of falls. This risk increases as we get older.
- **Strengthens bones and joints:** Walking is easier on your joints than running or aerobics (which are high impact activities). It also reduces your risk for osteoporosis.
- **Weight control, more energy, better sleep:** All benefits of a regular physical activity program.
- **Exercise Extra:** Walking shouldn't hurt. If it does, see your family physician. (*SparkPeople*)

GET LEAN LEGS - Your legs house some of the largest and most powerful muscle groups in your entire body. And the bigger the muscle, the more calories you burn when you exercise them. Your quadriceps are comprised of four muscles that run along the top of your leg from your hip to your knee. These muscles are what help you lift your upper leg at the hip, and they also help you straighten your entire leg at the knee. Along the back of your thighs are the three muscles that make up the hamstrings. These help you bend your leg at the knee. In your buttocks, there's the gluteus maximus, which works with your hamstrings to lift your leg back behind your torso. Why do you need to know all this? Because every time you lift, bend or otherwise move your legs, you're toning these muscles. Exercising these muscle groups will help smooth out your thighs, reduce the appearance of cellulite, lift your butt cheeks, and provide separation between your thighs and butt. (*LifeScript*)

Water: The Muscle Bath How it builds muscle: Whether it's in your shins or your shoulders, muscle is approximately 80 percent water. "Even a change of as little as 1 percent in body water can impair exercise performance and adversely affect recovery," says Volek. For example, a 1997 German study found that protein synthesis occurs at a higher rate in muscle cells that are well hydrated, compared with dehydrated cells. English translation: The more parched you are, the slower your body uses protein to build muscle. Not sure how dry you are? "Weigh yourself before and after each exercise session. Then drink 24 ounces of water for every pound lost," says Larry Kenney, Ph.D., a physiology researcher at Pennsylvania State University.

How it keeps you healthy: Researchers at Loma Linda University found that men who drank five or more 8-ounce glasses of water a day were 54 percent less likely to suffer a fatal heart attack than those who drank two or fewer. (*Men's Health*)