



# WALKING WITH A PURPOSE

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*A blog written by **Hannah Ceron** - UCD Intern*

Changes made to regular routine to incorporate healthier habits into daily life do not have to be drastic to be effective. Rather, small, incremental changes can sometimes make maintaining healthy habits easier and more sustainable. Through making your family or loved ones aware of your goals and willingness to take the steps toward better health, you may end up leading by example and have the support of others to help keep you on track with your goals. Some ways I've seen this played out through my own family include taking daily walks to remain active and choosing to drink water over sugary drinks.

My dad began 'mall-walking' in the morning as a meditative outlet to think about plans for the day, week, or as a time of prayer.

Visiting the mall early in the morning before the stores opened and crowds began to gather, this habit provided a free, indoor activity to escape the South Texas heat while remaining active. Daily morning walks can be helpful as providing an activity to help both physical and mental health by allowing the body to move and destress. Walking, to many able-bodied people, can be an activity taken for-granted or discounted as an "invalid" form of exercise; but can offer various health benefits such as aiding digestion, lowering blood sugar, and reducing the risk of heart disease by promoting heart health. As Hispanics native to the Rio Grande Valley with a family history of diabetes and related comorbidities such as

heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetic neuropathy, walking offered an accessible approach to making small changes in habits that over time could compound and allow for better health outcomes. As a low-intensity, low-impact form of movement, walking is an exercise that many people of all ages may be able to dedicate a portion of their day to.

On mornings that I would wake up on time, my dad would invite me to join him on his morning walks. Some days this looked like us each listening to our own music or podcasts, and other days gave us time to have meaningful conversations and quality time together. As two college students and working individuals with differing schedules, it can sometimes be hard for us to find or make time to spend together apart from family meals or occasional movie-nights; but morning mall-walks gave us time together early enough in the day that we could still carry on with our own busy schedules afterward.

Following our walks, we would often stop by to visit with other family members for breakfast or shopping errands, who after hearing my dad and I had just come back from a walk, decided she would like to join us the following day. A healthy routine started by one was adopted by two, and then three.

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Another thing I've experienced with my family is that even if one or two of us miss a morning walk, simply extending an invitation to walk at another time of day would many times be accepted.

I, personally, have found that I most enjoy walks after meal times to help with digestion and reduce bloating or post-meal fatigue that can come after heavier meals like pasta; while other members of my family enjoy joining me on post-meal walks for the positive effects it can have on helping regulate blood sugar spikes that occur after mealtimes. A simple walk around the neighborhood that requires no driving to a park or gym offers a casual and accessible approach to incorporating just a little time out of your day into physical activity. With busy work schedules and household responsibilities, it can oftentimes be hard to “find time” to workout, especially for the recommended minimum of 30 minutes a day; but by simply breaking this up into three 10-minute walks after each meal, this daily recommendation may seem much more attainable to many people. Any movement is good movement when it comes to preserving and maintaining health.

While the mall is still predominantly the most consistent “trail” we walk together, on weekends or other blocks shared free time, we will sometimes take our family walks beyond the neighborhood or mall and explore local parks. These walks can be more leisurely or fast-paced and can keep the low-impact exercise entertaining by changing up the scenery. It has also been fun to take note of the speed and endurance built among the family through consistent daily walks. While it isn’t always an activity that will make you sweat profusely, it is a great way to build heart health by switching up your pace and intensity to keep things interesting.

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*This blog was written by **Hannah Ceron** - UCD Intern and Ambassador. Hannah is currently a student at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley pursuing a Masters Degree in Health Sciences with a concentration in Nutrition.*

In summary, the journey toward healthy habits need not be a drastic change in daily routine, but rather a series of small, sustainable changes. By incorporating activities like morning or post meal-time walks, my family engages in simple yet effective habits to strengthen both physical and mental health, and prioritize communication and quality time. This approach not only fostered our well-being but also fostered meaningful family connections, making it a shared enjoyable experience. The ripple effect of one person's commitment to a healthier lifestyle extended to others, creating a collective effort that prevails above busy schedules. Through walks and shared moments, we found that health is not just an individual affair but a family goal.

