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From: David Powers
Communications Director
708.358.5781

Contact: Catherine McNamara
Department of Public Health
708.358.5484

Oak Park Walkers take nearly nine million steps toward better health

In the first two months after accepting a challenge to walk 10,000 steps a day, 26 Oak Parkers have taken nearly nine million collective steps (and counting) on the path toward better health. They walked more than one million steps in the first week alone.

The goal of the *Oak Park Walkers Challenge*, sponsored by the Department of Public Health, Oak Park YMCA, Park District of Oak Park and Temple Fitness, is to show that even simple activities like walking can be an enjoyable way to manage weight and stay healthy.

“Joining a walking group is a great way to start leading a healthier lifestyle,” said Oak Park Health Director Georgeen Polyak, PhD. “But sometimes it takes an incentive to get started. That’s why we launched a walkers challenge.”

Walkers who accepted the challenge first received information on walking technique, equipment, safety, interesting routes and existing walking groups in the community they might want to join. They also received a free check of their blood pressure and body mass, and a pedometer to help them keep track of their steps.

Many of the challenge participants said they were looking for ways to fit physical activity into their daily routine. They now walk with organized groups, with a partner or by themselves. Organized groups meet at the main Oak Park Public Library, 834 Lake St., at 8:45 a.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and at 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Walker Helen Whitfield said she joined the group because her doctor recommended that she increase her physical activity.

“After walking with a group for about a month I began to see many improvements in how I feel,” she said. “I feel alert and invigorated.”

Another walker, Elvira Alberins, walks for two hours every day and participates in walking group activities a few times a week.

“Walking is an easy, enjoyable way to exercise,” she said.

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Walkers Challenge
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Health Department officials said the program was started in the spring so that new walkers could establish walking as part of their regular schedule by fall since it takes about six months to lock in a new behavior.

Many walkers continue to walk during the winter, weather permitting. Others find indoor activities to continue their physical fitness regimes during the colder months, such as those showcased by the Oak Park Walkers in exercise seminars presented each winter.

To find out more about walking groups or other simple activities to increase daily physical activities call 708.358.5484 or email health@oak-park.us. The Health Department also is interested in residents' favorite walking routes. To share your route, call 708.358.5631 or email the Health Department.

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