

# The Journey... to a Better Quality of Life

by Cindy Asch-Martin

Changing your attitude toward exercise can be one of the most productive things you can do, not only for your body but for your mind as well. Make exercise a lifestyle and not a dreaded task that must be done. The benefits vary from strengthening the ligaments and tendons that support your skeletal system to boosting your muscle system. Exercise also releases endorphins, which some would call a natural high you get from increasing your metabolic rate and getting your blood flowing. You don't need equipment to reap the benefits – your own body weight will do just fine.

**WALKING** is one of the best movements to help your lower back and hip flexors stay strong, as well as your heart. Make sure that after a month or so of walking, you change up what you are doing. For example, if you're just walking around your neighborhood, try carrying a hand weight or use a backpack with something in it to add a bit more burden. Finding a street with a small incline (hill) can also make your walk a bit more challenging. Try taking long strides; really pushing your legs back with each step – this will help to stretch your hip flexors, as well as working your leg muscles effectively.

If you have steps in your home, make several trips up and down your stairs on a daily basis. This will help to strengthen your thigh (quadriceps), hamstrings and gluteal muscles. If you don't have stairs at home, a trip to your neighborhood mall is a handy alternative, especially in colder weather. See

if some friends are interested in joining you. You can also use a portable music device and listen to motivating music while walking and exercising.



**NUTRITION** is another key element in your journey to wellness. The more you focus on eating healthy foods, the more your body will respond in so many positive ways. When shopping, try to stay on the outside portion of the grocery store – this is where all of the fruits, vegetables and meats are usually located. The inside aisles contain processed foods that are loaded with preservatives and simple carbohydrates, which are contributing factors to diabetes, high cholesterol and obesity, to name a few.

**STRETCHING** is another excellent way to help your muscles, tendons and ligaments stay healthy. Mild stretching *after* exercise, rather than before, is the preferred method. Stretching before exercise, when our muscles are as stiff as cold toffee, can possibly lead to injury. Focus your stretching on your hips, hamstrings and quadriceps. Some people suffer from plantar fasciitis (inflammation of

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Photos provided by Cindy Asch-Martin

the ligament in the sole of the foot), which can be very uncomfortable. Stretching the bottom of your feet/foot is very important, and easy too. Take a towel, sit on your bed or the floor, and put it just below your toes. Holding the ends of the towel; pull toward you gently. Hold for a count of five, then slowly release while still holding the towel in your hands. Repeat this 10-15 times several times throughout your day.

**A HELPFUL HINT:** make sure that your socks are not 100 percent cotton; choose socks with a mix of cotton and spandex. It's also important that your shoe(s) fit comfortably and are not cracked and hard. Check the sole of your shoe to make sure that the heel is not worn unevenly. Sometimes people tend to walk on the outside or the inside portion of their shoe(s), which can cause hip pain.

Another important aspect of being a lower-limb amputee is that your hips are even in height. If you are walking with a limp, that will cause unnecessary pain in your hips and low back. Have your prosthetist check to ensure that the height of your prosthesis is even and level. Small adjustments to your socket and alignments can make a huge difference in your success, which in turn will make your exercise experience a positive one. 🌀