



# Stepping up to the challenge

**S**triving to be more active can be as easy as taking an extra step or two. Think about it: if you take about 10,000 steps a day, you will cover about 6.4km.

Nutritionist Shane Bilborough says it's all about stepping out of our comfort zones and taking the stairs instead of the lift, parking the car a little further away from work, or even hopping up out of the chair and walking around during TV commercials. You can even step up and down on the spot if you like.

And if you can encourage six of your workmates to join you, you can be part of the Global Corporate Challenge. Established by Bilborough and advertising executive Glenn Riseley in 2004, and supported by Olympian Herb Elliott, the challenge is a program aimed at encouraging corporate workers to get active and healthy.

The challenge attracted 3000 participants in its inaugural year, this year had 23,500, and is aiming for 70,000 in 2008. It works like this. Employees form teams of seven, each of whom records and enters their daily step count (or bicycle kilometres) on the challenge website. Pedometers are supplied, and the challenge runs for 125 days. The website converts the steps to distances, and takes participants on a virtual tour of the world. So the more active you are, the further you go.

Bilborough says the 10,000 steps a day benchmark has been chosen for several reasons. It equates to about 400 calories, and studies have shown that sustaining the routine in the medium term can lower cholesterol, blood pressure, help people lose weight, reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes, and improve general fitness and wellbeing.

But what happens after the 125 days are

up, do people continue to walk? He says anecdotal evidence suggests it does bring

about a change in mindset and behaviour, with many participants continuing to wear their pedometers, and to look for opportunities to walk. A two-year study will begin with next year's challenge to look at whether the exercise is sustained, as well as the long-term effects of the challenge on reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes.

"We have a great sample size, so it's a great opportunity," Bilborough says.

A study of 144 participants in the 2006 challenge has already thrown up some interesting statistics:

- Before the challenge, 95.3 per cent of men and 72 per cent of women were classified as having an increased risk of Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease. After the challenge, this fell by 32.8 per cent for women, and 23.3 per cent for men.

- The women had an average weight loss of 6kg, and a reduction in average waist measurement of 8cm; the men 5kg and 5cm.

- Twenty-nine people lost 8kg or more, with an average weight loss of 16.2kg. They increased their step count by an average 8500 a day.

- Members of the top 10 teams in this year's event recorded an average of more than 23,000 steps a day each, with one chap in Sydney averaging more than 50,000 – and losing 38kg.

Bilborough stresses that each person's step tally is confidential. Each team member can see their own data, and that of the team, but not of other individuals.

He says walking was chosen because they wanted something that everyone could be involved in. "And you have to make physical activity fun if you are going to maintain it." Hence the team

format, which acts not just as a support network, but as a motivator.

"We live in a country where the majority of people are inactive. And our lifestyle is so non-conducive to being active. It is easy to sit down. It is easy not to cook [and eat take-away]."

The challenge is run as a private business, funded by entry costs of \$99 a person (\$693 a team). There is no government backing. Bilborough says this is disappointing, given the positive impact it can have on participants' health.

"But we can't dwell on that. We have to keep moving forward with it." And part of that means opening an office in Britain and the US to attract more competitors worldwide.

"Initially we put our houses up to fund it. It was daunting and we did not get too much sleep. But it's a nice feeling to be involved in an event which has an impact."

For more information, visit [www.gccevent.com](http://www.gccevent.com)

## food for thought

It takes:

- 3904 steps to walk off a can of soft drink
- 7173 steps to walk off a chocolate bar
- 12,464 to walk off a fast-food burger

For healthy adults:

- 12,000+ steps a day – you are highly active
- 10,000-12,499 – active
- 7500-9999 – somewhat active
- 5000-7499 – low active
- less than 5000 – sedentary



Prue Fuller leads Walk for the Cure participants. Healthier living can be as simple as taking a few extra steps each day