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## WebMD Expert Blogs

### Everyday Fitness

with Pamela Peeke, MD, MPH, FACP

Living life to the fullest is all about striving for a mind-body balance every day. Achieve a mental, nutritional, and physical transformation for life with tips from wellness expert Pamela Peeke, MD.

Friday, June 11, 2010

#### The Surgeon General's Walk for a Fit and Healthy Nation

I have just returned from the annual meeting of the [American College of Sports Medicine \(ACSM\)](#) in Baltimore, MD. And I have news for you. [Dr. Regina Benjamin](#), our U.S. Surgeon General and my friend and colleague, made history at this meeting. On June 2nd, Dr. Benjamin launched her [Walks for a Fit and Healthy Nation](#) by leading a group of hundreds of healthy lifestyle enthusiasts from the Baltimore convention center to the Inner Harbor, where she addressed the participants as well as the media. She also signed a large poster board **Rx for America**.

PRESCRIPTION

  
 Your Prescription for Health  
 www.ExerciseIsMedicine.org

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FOR: *America*      DATE: *June 2, 2010*      REFILLS: *Unlimited*

Rx

- ✓ *Stay as active as possible*
- ✓ *Eat fruits and vegetables daily*
- ✓ *Get the whole family involved*
- ✓ *Be creative and have fun!*

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ROBERT SALLIS, M.D.                      REGINA BENJAMIN, M.D., M.B.A.  
 Chair, Exercise is Medicine              U.S. Surgeon General

Exercise is Medicine™

The instructions are clear:

- ❖ Stay as active as possible.
- ❖ Eat fruits and vegetables daily.
- ❖ Get the whole family involved.
- ❖ Be creative and have fun.

And notice on the Rx where it designates "refills", it simply says "unlimited".

Here's some important back story. Several years ago, ACSM, under the leadership of Dr. Bob Sallis, past ACSM president, founded a unique and exciting program called the [Exercise IS Medicine](#) global campaign. The plan engages consumers and medical providers alike as partners in a blueprint to get and stay physically active. The purpose was to get the message out there to the public that [physical inactivity is a major public health problem](#) and people need to [start incorporating some level of activity into their daily lives](#) – to save their lives.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), in 2008 at least 36% of adults didn't do any kind of leisure time activity. I can only imagine that numbers a whole lot higher now. Sallis's quote says it all:

*"Exercise can be used like a vaccine to prevent disease and a medication to treat disease. If there were a drug with the same benefits as exercise, it would instantly be the standard of care."*

I'll bet you didn't know that inactivity poses as great a health risk as smoking, and is associated with an increased incidence of [heart disease](#), [diabetes](#), [cancer](#), [high blood](#)



**Pamela Peeke, MD, MPH, FACP**  
 EXPERT

Pamela Peeke, MD, MPH, FACP, is an internationally renowned expert and speaker in women's health, fitness and nutrition. Peeke is a Pew Foundation Scholar in Nutrition and Metabolism, and one of the only physicians in America formally trained in nutrition science. Dr. Peeke is founder of the Peeke Performance® Center, which offers her Lifestyle Management Program guiding clients through the mental and physical transformations of their life journeys.

Is also an expert in the following:

- [WebMD Diet Community](#)

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pressure, depression, arthritis and osteoporosis. For example, in a recent study of women with hormone-responsive breast cancer, those who walked at a moderate pace three to five times per week had a 50% decrease in the risk of dying from the disease compared to sedentary women.

More research has shown that regular physical activity has remarkable benefits. It can boost your immune system and fight viruses and bacterial infections, reducing sick days by up to 50%, with just a simple 30 minute brisk walk five times a week. And, exercise can slow the aging process. German scientists found that active people experience less erosion of telomeres (DNA strands at the tips of chromosomes, which when shortened, signal cell death) than their couch potato counterparts.

Our Surgeon General read the studies and was convinced that getting up and moving more should be an essential element of her campaign. At the ACSM meeting, Dr. Benjamin accepted her new role as the Honorary Chair of the *Exercise IS Medicine* Executive Council. I'm thrilled because I'm the *Exercise IS Medicine* national spokesperson. We'll be able to team up and make sure this "inactivity is killing you" message gets out there to all Americans.

And we didn't waste any time. Up in the green room, we kicked off our dress heels, donned our sneakers and led the walk, showing everyone that this Surgeon General literally walks the talk. We were joined by Jim Ryun, ACSM member, Olympian (the first high school student to break the 4 minute mile) and former Kansas Congressman. He, too, is passionate, especially about getting kids up and active for their mental and physical fitness, and will be joining the ACSM *Exercise IS Medicine* team.

Dr. Benjamin is perfect for this role as the "walking Surgeon General" because she is not an Olympian. She's a busy, traveling, time-constrained family physician who's just as stressed about keeping up with good nutrition and physical activity as the rest of us. She's slugging it out, adapting and adjusting to the sleep, healthy eating and activity speed bumps we're all trying to navigate. She's human and she's real.



Dr. Benjamin will be conducting many more walks throughout the nation, so make sure to stay tuned for events that will be occurring in your neck of the woods. A core message is not that people have to feel like they need to live in a gym. Instead, it's about integrating more activities of daily living (e.g. don't break out into hives when you see a hill or stairs) throughout the day. Dancing and playing outdoors and finding activities that the whole family can enjoy are integral to this campaign.

It's time that physical activity got the respect it deserves. Our bodies were built to move and if we don't, they deteriorate and we become sick and disabled. If you really want to enjoy life, then you need a body (and mind) that can do just that. If you want to shed weight and keep it off for life, you cannot achieve that goal without [daily physical activity](#). That's a combination of cardio and weight training because you need both endurance and strength to get through life.

Here's a teaser for an upcoming blog, so stay tuned. I'll be leading a Grand Canyon rim-to-rim hike in September and Dr. Benjamin will be joining me. Her walks across the nation are part of her training program, as she shows one and all that she is definitely the doc who walks – and hikes – the talk.

**What are you doing to be active everyday? [Share your comments and questions with the Diet Community.](#)**

Posted by: Pamela Peeke, MD at 10:14 am

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