

## Regular Walking Promotes Independence

Older adults can decrease their risk of disability and increase their likelihood of maintaining independence by 41 percent by participating in a walking exercise program, according to a new University of Georgia study. The study, which appeared in the *Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy*, also found that walking program participants increased their peak aerobic capacity by 19 percent and increased their physical function by 25 percent. “In the past decade, researchers have focused on the benefits of strength training in maintaining independence, but until now we didn’t have good evidence using an objective performance measure that a walking program would improve physical functioning,” said study co-author M. Elaine Cress, professor of kinesiology and researcher in the UGA Institute of Gerontology. “Our study found that walking offers tremendous health benefits that can help older adults stay independent.”

The researcher program group met three times a week for four months and would walk for 10 minutes continually. As the weeks progressed, they increased their walking time to 40 continuous minutes. Each session began with a 10-minute warm-up and ended with a 10-minute cool-down that included balance and flexibility exercises. Trudy Moore-Harrison, the lead author of the study, added that walking doesn’t require any special equipment other than a pair of comfortable shoes, which makes it a simple and low-cost way for people to become active. Getting people to stick with exercise programs can be difficult, but the researchers found that every single member of the group stayed with the program for its four-month duration. “People really enjoyed the program,” said Moore-Harrison. “It gave them an opportunity to make new friends and get to know their neighbors. We know that walking is good for you, but too many people still aren’t doing it,” Moore-Harrison said. “This study shows that just walking on a regular basis can make a huge impact on quality of life.”