STEP UP, SANTA MONICA
CAN WE WALK OUR WAY TO WELLBEING?

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For six months, it meant actually counting the strides themselves. We focused on one part of the city – the 90404 ZIP code, in the middle and eastern parts of Santa Monica – because the project would be more effective at a smaller scale in a single area. We knew the 90404 ZIP code was Santa Monica's most diverse area, that its residents reported lower rates of physical activity than those of other neighborhoods, and that the area had the lowest income levels in the city (which can have a bearing on physical activity).

Fitbit donated 200 Alta fitness trackers. A company called Fitabase, which does research using wearable devices, helped compile the statistics. The RAND Corporation jumped in to compare the results to other health data we had and to help us analyze what it all meant. And 168 people in the 90404 ZIP code volunteered to let the trackers gauge their physical activity quite literally step by step.

The general rule is that it takes 10,000 steps a day to do your health any good. That’s roughly about four miles. At an average walking pace, that’s about 1 hour 20 minutes a day. The emphasis is on walking rather than other kinds of physical activity because it’s the one form of exercise available to virtually every able-bodied person. It takes no expensive special equipment. And the pace and duration are completely up to each individual.

The average American takes a little more than 5,000 steps in a day. What the Fitbit pilot project found is that those who live in the 90404 ZIP code take more steps per day than the average American – about 8,220, or 60% more – but still fall short of the 10,000-step goal by about 18%.

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NUMBER OF STEPS BY ETHNICITY

- Non-Hispanic Whites: 8,586
- Hispanics: 8,467
- Non-Hispanic Blacks: 4,213

STEPS BY FINANCIAL STABILITY

8,962 steps per day
Those who reported they are financially comfortable made the greatest strides

6,407 steps per day
Those who said they were finding it difficult to get by financially took the fewest steps

NUMBER OF STEPS BY AGE

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

The volunteers between 55 and 65 averaged the greatest number of steps each day (9,645 steps).

Those in the 65+ age group averaged the lowest number (6,407 steps).
The point of all the numbers, of course, is to figure out what the City of Santa Monica might be able to do to help its residents lead healthier, more active and more fulfilling lives. Our study found that volunteers in our six-month study who think Santa Monica City government supports physical activity are already walking substantially more than those who don’t think the City sufficiently supports exercise.

There are a good many things the City of Santa Monica is already doing to encourage residents to be on the move, and a number of new things in the works. Some, like the exercise room at Memorial Park, are open seven days a week. Others, like the exercise equipment at Reed and Ishihara Parks and the parcourse at Clover Park, let you work other parts of your body while you stroll between stations. Think of the bonus steps you’ll be taking when you decide to walk to and from the park. And if you run out of ideas, there is an online app in testing right now that can point you toward recreational activities citywide.

Later this year, the City Council will update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, a blueprint for the next 20 years on Santa Monica parks and beaches. While professionals and elected officials will draw together and present many options, the process is very much a public one. Residents who have ideas about what would help them get moving are free to submit them.

Cities can provide facilities and encouragement, but ultimately, every individual needs to take the steps toward a healthier life. Active lives are healthier lives, and healthier lives are more fulfilling lives.

*Step up, Santa Monica!*