

Go back to the mall... with your sneakers on

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Is winter weather putting a damper on your exercise routine? Don't be daunted by snow, ice or other poor conditions. Instead, take your exercise inside the mall.

You've had enough of the mall, you say?

Unless you order everything online, holiday shopping can certainly lead to "mall overload". But now you can go back for a healthy dose of exercise. The benefits include:

- **It's free.** If you favor low-cost (or no-cost) exercise, you'll love mall-walking: it's on the house – or the mall, actually. Naturally, if you're a serious window shopper, there could be some expenses unrelated to your walk. But the exercise won't cost you a dime.
- **It's indoors.** It never rains, sleets or snows in the mall. Even in summer, it's a temperate place to walk. It's got smooth surfaces and lots of good views. When the store windows are transformed, you even get a change of scenery. What more could you ask for?
- **It's got social benefits.** Many malls have groups of walkers. There may be a group of seniors, moms with strollers or people recovering from injuries or illness. The mall may allow you to come before it opens so you can walk without bumping into shoppers. You can join up with a group or walk solo if you like. Some malls even run programs for their walkers. They may have speakers on health issues, rewards for miles walked, planned activities and more.
- **It's secure.** Most malls have security on staff so you can walk in a safe place. There may be a special parking area set up for early walkers. And many issue cards and badges for identification.

Finding a mall walking group

Contact your mall and ask for the customer services or management office. You may be surprised to find out that mall walking is a well-established activity at your mall. If not, consider starting a group. Management may even help you with publicity since it's an activity that will draw people to their mall.

Walking is great exercise

The most obvious benefit to mall walking is that you get exercise. Whether you're strolling, power-walking or going at a pace in between, walking is good for you.

Wendy Bumgardner is a certified marathon coach who writes articles about the benefits of walking. She says that walking at a moderate pace for 30-60 minutes can burn fat and build muscle.¹ In addition, walking can help reduce the risk of heart disease, breast cancer, colon cancer, diabetes and stroke.¹

It's good for people who have osteoporosis, too. A study done by Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital found that post-menopausal women who walked 30 minutes a day cut their risk of hip fracture by 40%.² Other studies show that regular walking can help slow mental decline, improve breathing, boost energy and even help you sleep better.²

So if you're looking for a warm place to walk without setting up a treadmill at home or joining a gym, it could be the perfect answer to winter weather.

¹www.lifescrypt.com

²www.arthritis.org