

MIZZOU

The magazine of
the Mizzou Alumni Association

[Home](#) » [Summer 2011](#) » [Around the Columns](#) » Matter over mind

Around the Columns

Matter over mind

Whether we want to will ourselves to the weight room or if we ponder the path to the pool, we all get a good mental workout contemplating exercise. But with obesity rates at an all-time high, it seems the brain muscle is the only one getting flexed. According to one MU researcher, and to borrow a phrase from a certain sports equipment company, we need to stop thinking about exercise and ... just do it.

Vicki Conn, associate dean for research in the Sinclair School of Nursing, found the most effective way to get people to exercise is to focus on behavior-changing strategies, not cognitive approaches.

“We all know exercise is important, that it’s good for us,” Conn says. “But the research shows that knowing more about the benefits of exercise doesn’t change behavior.”

Because knowing the number of steps a day the average person is supposed to take won’t spur people to actually take those steps, Conn has devised two methods to change behavior. The first is self-monitoring, or keeping a journal of exercising events. In the pursuit of 10,000 steps, the recommended number for maintaining weight, a pedometer proves practical.

The other is prompting.

“Put your walking shoes right in the way of your bedroom door so that you have to see them when you wake up in the morning,” Conn says. “That’s a prompt to remind you to exercise.”

The study, which appeared in the February 2011 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, gathered data from more than 350 research reports including nearly 100,000






According to Vicki Conn, knowing the benefits of exercise doesn't generate enough motivation to change behaviors.

participants.

According to Conn, with the epidemic proportions of obesity and heart disease, it is more important than ever to get exercise, which can delay the onset of chronic conditions such as diabetes.

“The thought of exercise may be overwhelming, but slowly increasing activity by just 10 minutes a day adds up weekly and is enough to provide health benefits.”

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Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916
| E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

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Last updated: Feb. 15, 2013