The W's of Walking

Sometimes, once we've done something for a while, we forget what it was like to learn how to do it. When someone then asks us a question about what we do or how we do it, we oversimplify to the point our answers are not helpful. I saw a woman post a question tonight on a walking forum I follow. The woman wants to start walking to lose weight, and she asked, "Where do you walk?" Someone replied, "I walk anywhere!" I probably would have answered the same way, but the more I thought about it, I realized it's not really a helpful answer. The woman wanting to start walking also asked, "Do you walk by yourself or do you team up with others?" It then dawned on me that maybe we need to answer the five basic W's of walking: who, what, when, where and why.

Who (With Someone or By Yourself?)   Until this year, I normally walked by myself or with my little neighbor girl. I enjoy the time to think, to hear the birds, to go at my own pace – lots of reasons why walking by yourself is great. This year, I started walking with others more often, and that has just as many great qualities. You can laugh and talk, which makes the time go faster. There is someone to force you to go a little faster or a little slower. There are benefits to walking by yourself *and* with others, so I now try to mix it up a bit. There is no right or wrong way to do it.

If you walk by yourself, there are apps you can put on your phone, so someone else knows where you are at all times. I use RoadID. I start the app, and it sends a message to the person(s) I indicate. That person will get a map and be able to see where I am. If I stop moving for five minutes, it will give a warning. If I don't shut off that warning, it will send the person a message. There are many other apps, so find one that works for you.

When my friend Mary Ann and I were training for the 50k hike a couple of years ago, we did not walk together one time. We both used the app Mapmywalk. Through that app, I would receive a message on my phone when she finished a walk. That was great motivation, and it made it feel like we were training together.

If you walk with someone, do you run out of things to talk about? It's different with every person. Mary Ann and I actually didn't talk that much during the 50k. We can walk together in comfortable silence. I've walked with some people where it's constant chatter back and forth. It just depends. Find what's comfortable to you. And it's okay if it changes from one person to another and one day to another – sometimes I feel more like talking than other days.

__What:__ Walks, of course! Leisure walks, nature walks, hikes, walking races, walking meetings, functional walks (to run errands, to get somewhere, etc.).   All kinds of walks!

__When:__ I am not a morning person, so my walks are at lunch time and in the evenings. Mary Ann walks primarily in the morning before work. My Mapmywalk app is buzzing each morning as I'm getting ready for work telling me that she just finished her miles. She's amazing. (Don't tell her I said that!)

__Where:__ My favorite walking routes are right out my door! I love the gravel roads. I have all kinds of loops mapped out in the country depending on the distance or number of hills I want to do that day. If the weather is either really hot or really cold, I may do loops closer to home or in town. I may pick out a one-mile loop in town and repeat it… several times. I've been known to pass the same house seven times.

At lunch time, I walk around the parking lots at work or I'll walk to the soccer field and walk around it a few times. We have an indoor track, so I walk around it in the winter time. I've even been known to walk the hallways and climb the stairs repeatedly.

I also love that I can walk a quarter mile to a friend's house to walk in town. We then walk another half mile to pick up another friend or two. It's the best feeling in the world to have had a frustrating day, walk with friends, and then be laughing by the end of the walk.

Other options:

- Find a local high school's track and see if it's open to the public.
- Roads and trails at a local park or nearby state park. Walking through the woods works different muscles, but the softer surface can help if your feet or legs are hurting. It can also provide more shade on those hot days.
- The perimeter of a large parking lot – maybe the local school's parking lot is an option for walking in the evening.
- Are your kids in sports and you have to attend the games or practices? Walk the sidelines.
- Your local mall.

- Some cemeteries allow people to walk the roads. (This is frowned upon other places, so be considerate of local customs.)
- Hay fields! When I was preparing to hike the Grand Canyon, a farmer down the road from me allowed me to climb the hills in his hay fields. It was winter, so a few times, I'd wear my snowshoes to do it – great workout!
- Build the walking into your day. Park at the far end of the parking lot. Walk the aisles at the perimeter of the store once or twice before you actually start shopping. Climb an extra flight of stairs at work. Get off the bus or subway a stop early.

Why: Check out the hundred reasons on the Walk with a Doc site about why people walk. Can you add any reasons to it?

Once you start making walking a priority, you'll start thinking of things differently. As you drive down a road, you'll think, "Oh, this would be a great road to walk! I want to be able to walk up this hill one day!" As walking becomes a priority, you'll find opportunities in your schedule you didn't notice before. For example, you might be waiting for someone in a building. Once walking is a priority, you'll notice the long hallway *and* the ten minutes you have before the other person arrives.

Once walking is a priority, you'll be able to define these five W's your own way, and you'll be saying, "I walk anywhere!"

Have great walks this week and share your pictures with us! I love to see and hear what other walkers are doing – you are such an inspiration!

A sixth W of walking will be coming soon. It's an important one - what to *WEAR*!