



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

...from the
director's chair

Walk this way

There's an old adage that says a journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step. I took that first step last fall, and as of mid-January I'd hiked over 780 kms, and placed one foot in front of the other no less than 1,319,418 times.

If you'd told me back in October that in a 90-day period I could walk from Ottawa to St. Leonard, N.B., I'd have said you're nuts. But that's just what I've done. I'm not bragging – well, maybe a little bit – but I wanted to share with you how easy it was once I got into the routine.

Forgive me for being a little preachy, but I know how difficult exercise can be for someone cooped up in a truck all day. The few square feet in front of my computer is like that. I work alone, so traipsing off to the gym at lunchtime with a bunch of co-workers isn't an option, and left on my own, well...

But in an industry where the average life span of a driver is 61 years, health and wellness – yours and mine – is a big concern.

Back in November I wrote about the highlight of our healthy driver activities at Truxpo, the nifty HealthChek station that was generously loaned to us by Coastal Pacific Xpress (CPx), the Surrey, B.C.-based industry leader in developing wellness programs for its drivers and employees.

In addition to vital biometric statistics, the kiosks are used by members of the walking club – one of the many innovative CPx healthy staff initiatives – to track their progress. Walkers upload data from their company-supplied pedometers, and there are rewards for the achievers and encouragement for the stragglers.

I was intrigued by these simple devices that a couple of hundred CPx drivers and employees walk around with in their pockets, so I bought one myself. And I'm completely hooked. CPx uses the

HJ-720ITC Pocket Pedometer from Omron Healthcare, which is a little more expensive than some on the market, but the device has tracking and recording capabilities that make it well worth the extra bucks. I think that's the key to my success with it.

For me, I discovered that an average day's walking is around 10,000 steps. That includes a trip to my favourite greasy spoon for breakfast (one poached egg, rye toast, grapefruit wedges), a trip or two to a coffee shop near home, and another dash out to the grocery store or maybe the bank or the library. It's nothing I wouldn't already be doing, though on cold or rainy days I'd probably have driven instead of walked. Now I bundle up or grab an umbrella.

Such is the addiction to walking – or maybe it's an addiction to achieving a goal.

The pedometer tracks regular steps and also gives credit for 'aerobic steps' if you walk at least 10 minutes continuously at a pace of more than 60 steps a minute. I plot my routes so I can get the full 10-minute stretch, and therefore the credit and benefit of 10 minutes of aerobic walking, with my heart beating a little faster for a little longer. I've had to come up with a couple of tricks to get credit for aerobic steps, like taking a one-block longer route to the diner to stretch the usual eight-minute walk to 10 minutes. And no more cutting across the vacant lot on the corner.

My pedometer also tracks calories and fat used, so I know that I've burned up 26,335 calories and 1,559 grams of fat since I started. It's all there in a little graph on my computer, courtesy of software that comes with the pedometer. It's a marvelous way to track my daily progress and maintain my enthusiasm for the next walk.



**Joanne
Ritchie:**
OBAC
executive
director

But is it really worth it? Can a walk around the block benefit anyone with a 70-hour work week that involves sitting for up to 14 hours a day? You betcha. Research has shown that as little as 150 minutes of brisk physical activity a week, broken down into 10-minute increments, leads to noticeable health benefits. That's a 10-minute walk (aerobic steps!) three times a day, five times a week.

I expected to have difficulty reaching my goal when I was travelling, especially on my long car rides back and forth to the Maritimes, but I was pleasantly surprised. In some ways, it was actually easier, as I was already out and about and didn't have to lure myself away from the cozy nest in front of my computer. A couple of laps around a rest area, or the long way back to the car across the truck stop parking lot would usually net me a mile or more.

I'd like to see more truck drivers hooked on this low-impact, low-burden way of getting a little exercise. There's no gym membership and no spandex involved. The only necessary equipment is a good pair of walking shoes, although the pedometer was the deal maker for me. It helps with goal-setting and discipline, which I so sorely need, and the sense of accomplishment you feel when you see the mile-meter creeping up into double and triple digits is exhilarating.

Anybody can squeeze 30 minutes out of a day. Just spend it walking rather than sitting in a truck stop complaining about the price of tomatoes. Which you can also do, by the way, while walking.