

# Walk Kansas

*celebrate healthy living*

**K-STATE**  
Research and Extension

Newsletter #5 • 2015

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## *Strength at Your Core*

The core includes all muscle groups that stabilize and support the spine. This includes abdominal and back muscles and those around the pelvis. You can also think of the core region as your body except for your limbs.

Strong core muscles make it possible for you stand upright and move on two feet. They help you balance, shift body weight, stop and start, and move in any direction. They also protect your body from the wear and tear of sitting all day.

There are many reasons why you should strengthen your core. Perhaps most importantly, it is something you can do to take care of yourself as you age. Here are more reasons to strengthen your core:

- 1. Prevent back pain.** Low back pain affects four out of five Americans at some point during their lives. You can prevent back pain by doing exercises that strengthen and bring balance to the front and back of your body. If you sit for a long period of time, practice sitting tall and avoid slouching in your chair. If you can, sit on a stability ball part of the day instead of a traditional chair. The ball creates the sense of instability and movement, which will force you to use core muscles to stay on the ball.



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## Strength at Your Core

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**2. Improve posture.** Your posture will automatically improve as you strengthen core muscles, and you will carry yourself with more confidence. Good posture will lessen wear and tear on your spine and will allow you to breathe deeply. Practice good posture throughout your day, when sitting, standing, and walking. One tip for improving posture while driving is to adjust your rear-view mirror when you are sitting tall. As you start to slump, you will lose sight of yourself and can use this cue to sit up tall again.

**3. Make everyday tasks easier.** Most basic activities of daily living call on your core, such as bending to put on shoes, dressing, bathing, cooking, and just standing or sitting. Housework, gardening, and fix-it tasks require the core as you bend, lift, twist, carry, and reach. Strengthening core muscles will help you do these tasks easier.

**4. Improve balance.** The core muscles stabilize your body and allow you to move in any direction or stand in one spot without losing your balance. When you walk on a bumpy surface, such as an uneven sidewalk or walking path, your core muscles are working. You can reduce your risk of falling by strengthening your core.

Several videos that demonstrate core exercises have been added to the *Walk Kansas website*. One of the best exercises to engage core muscles is a plank, and you will find several variations of this exercise. Yoga is another activity that strengthens the core. Watch for videos next week that will demonstrate basic yoga movements and poses.

## 2014 Success Stories

It has been great to walk during my lunch hours and bond with my co-workers/team members. I love this program. It's a jump start to more exercising at home.

— Southwind District – Allen County

I had an 87-year-old on my team. He was so consistent every week and was such an inspiration to keep us all moving with a great attitude!

— Post Rock District – Mitchell County

As a result of Walk Kansas, my son and I have started making better food choices such as salads in place of pizza. Our taste for food has changed. Fruits and vegetables have more appeal and junk food looks and smells bad to us now. We enjoy a walk after we eat, and we are looking forward to riding our bikes.

— Wyandotte County

## Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

### Be Ready for Exercise



There are many ways you can change the environment around you to make it easier to get extra steps in your day. Start with your calendar and schedule time for a 10-minute walk or 30-minute exercise session. Schedule this like any other appointment. Here are more ways to be ready for exercise:

- Pack a bag with exercise clothing and shoes, and keep it in your car or office. This way you will always be ready for a walk, a game of basketball, or a session at the gym.
- Choose a parking spot far away from your destination.
- Leave exercise shoes by the door as a reminder.
- Carry a bottle of water — always.
- Prepare mentally, and visualize yourself walking, doing strengthening exercises, eating fruit for a snack, and practicing other healthy habits.

## Legumes: Nutrition Powerhouses

Legumes (beans, peas, and lentils) are nutrition powerhouses and are unique because, nutritionally, they belong to both the protein and vegetable food groups. They have no cholesterol, are high in fiber, and naturally low in fat. Legumes are also good sources of folate, potassium, iron, and magnesium. When included in your diet, they can help reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. They are a good choice for people who must control blood sugar, and a good alternative for a meatless meal. Some are used as ground flours for those with gluten intolerance.

Legumes are versatile. They are inexpensive and available dry, canned, or frozen. One half cup of cooked beans or peas equals 2 ounces of protein or a serving of vegetables and provides 10 grams of dietary fiber.

Though dry beans don't require soaking, doing so reduces cooking time and helps dissolve gas-producing oligosaccharides, easing digestion. For soaking, use 10 cups of water per pound. Beans double or triple in size, so use a large pot. Bring water to a boil and simmer beans 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and let stand 1 to 4 hours. Drain, add fresh water, and cook 2 hours or until tender. Do not add salt while cooking as it can cause beans to toughen.

Lentils and split peas do not require soaking. Sort and remove debris, rinse, and boil lentils 15 to 20 minutes, split peas 30 minutes. Do not add salt

during cooking. To save time, cook dried beans and peas, divide into smaller quantities, and freeze. Package in 1½-cup quantities, and use in

recipes to replace a 15-ounce can of beans. To reduce sodium in canned beans, drain and rinse them. This will remove about 40 percent of the sodium.

There are many ways you can add legumes to your diet. At the salad bar, add garbanzo and kidney beans; add lentils to spaghetti sauce; include beans and lentils when making soup, stew, or a casserole. Enjoy hummus as a snack with vegetable dippers and whole-grain pita bread or crackers, and spread on a sandwich or wrap. Prepare legumes as a side dish, and explore how other cultures feature beans by trying an ethnic recipe. Edamame (green soybeans) are great as a snack, and add them to salads, casseroles, and rice dishes.

For more information on using beans, peas, and lentils go the *Healthy Eating for Life* page of the Walk Kansas website and the *American Institute for Cancer Research*.



## Ultimate Greek Chopped Salad

Makes 12 servings

### Salad Ingredients:

- 4 to 5 Roma tomatoes, diced
- 1 cucumber, diced
- 1 large red bell pepper, diced
- 1 small red onion, diced
- 1 15-ounce can garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed or 1½ cups cooked dry garbanzo beans

Optional: Feta cheese

### Dressing Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ teaspoon salt (or less)

### Directions:

1. In a small bowl, combine all ingredients for the dressing and whisk to combine. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, combine cucumbers, tomatoes, red pepper, onion, and garbanzo beans. Add dressing and toss to combine.
3. This can be served immediately or refrigerate for an hour so flavors combine. Stir salad before serving.



### Nutrition information per ½-cup serving:

100 calories;  
6 g fat;  
11 g carbohydrates;  
3 g protein; 1 g fiber;  
140 mg sodium.