

UA Employess Encouraged to Participate in Walk Across Arizona

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Spending a great deal of time driving and working in an office environment can contribute to a sedentary lifestyle, which may help lead to the onset of numerous health-related problems, such as heart disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Simply walking more can go a long way in improving health, and University of Arizona employees are encouraged to get on their feet for the Walk Across Arizona campaign.

A statewide program headed by the UA Cooperative Extension, [Walk Across Arizona](#) ^[1] encourages teams of two to 10 members to engage in healthier lifestyles by walking and exercising more.

Participating teams track the number of miles they walk each day over an eight-week period.

A community fitness program run in every county in Arizona, Walk Across Arizona was born out of a partnership developed in 1997 between the UA's Cooperative Extension and the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health.

Last year, UA Life & Work Connections began promoting the program specifically to UA employees to encourage them to exercise and adopt healthy habits.

"There is such a lack of exercise when you're working full time at a desk, so to be able to get out and walk and have some aerobic exercise during the week is critical," said Nancy Rogers, worksite wellness program nutrition and fitness counselor with Life & Work Connections and a registered dietitian.

Last year, 30 UA teams, made up of 264 members, participated in the walking program, said Linda Block, an associate agent with the UA Cooperative Extension who works with Walk Across Arizona in Pima County.

An informational meeting and registartion kickoff event for this year's program will be held at noon on Tuesday in the Ventana Room of the Student Union Memorial Center.

Walk Across Arizona officially begins Feb. 1. Teams must choose a name and a team captain and register with the Cooperative Extension. Over the duration of the program, participants are able to track their progress, and the progress of other teams, online.

On March 3, at noon, UA President Robert N. Shelton will host a short walk, which will begin at the stage on the UA Mall, which is located just east of Old Main. Everyone is welcome to join.

Now in its eighth year, Walk Across Arizona is not a competition and it is not a fundraiser. Its primary focus is to encourage a natural inclination toward exercising.

"The theoretical basis for the program was to use social support networks to increase physical activity levels within the community by developing and maintaining walking clubs," the program's Web site notes.

But that's not to say some friendly competition doesn't arise.

Last year, the two floors of the Arizona Health Sciences Center Library competed for the most miles walked, said Joan Schlimgen, the library's assistant director for resources, although she says she's not sure who won.

This year, Schlimgen will participate again and said she hopes the program helps engage UA employees in something positive.

"Right now the University is going through some tough times, and people are stressed," she said. "It's been documented that exercise helps with stress levels."

Ideally, participants in Walk Across Arizona will walk an average of 10,000 steps daily, Block said.

"The research shows that physical activity can improve our health, particularly when it comes to chronic disease," she said. "But we don't get enough."

Marilyn Overpeck, an accountant in the Financial Services Office, said she began participating in Walk Across Arizona about four years ago as part of a plan to lose weight and get in shape. In the beginning, she only logged about 700 steps a day on her pedometer.

"It was a wake-up call that I led a sedentary life," she said.

Now, Overpeck says she's able to meet the 10,000-step mark and she's added exercises like yoga, spinning, hiking and weight training to her routine as well.

Walk Across Arizona is also an opportunity for UA employees to meet and spend time walking together in a supportive environment, said Garry Forger, grants manager for the Learning Technologies Center. He was team captain of the "Trekking Techies" last year.

"It's a way to get to know people from other floors in the building."

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Links

[1] <http://cals.arizona.edu/walkacrossaz/>