



In This Issue:

Beyond Walk Kansas: Habits for a Healthier Life
How Long Does It Take to Lose Fitness?
Raise a Glass to Wellness: Stay Hydrated Every Day
Recipe: Summer Sangria

Coming Next Year:

March 21 – May 15, Walk Kansas 2027

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Kansas State University Walk Kansas

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Extension, Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts. Kansas State University is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Beyond Walk Kansas: Habits for a Healthier Life

Congratulations on completing Walk Kansas 2026! If you have been walking or doing some other type of activity, and adding strengthening/stretching exercises at least twice a week, you likely have noticed your daily activities are easier, that you have more stamina and endurance, and you feel stronger.

We know the online system has not been ideal and we have a list of fixes and changes to make for next year. While the program has officially ended, we will leave the trails open for you to explore and learn more about our wonderful state. Maybe you'll be able to visit some of these places in person this summer!

Walk Kansas is officially in session only 8 weeks of the year, but we want healthful habits to be part of your lifestyle. The weekly newsletter offers key messages, and these letters will remain in the portal and on the [website](#). Here are highlights from 2026:

Week 1: Your [Walk Kansas Activity Guide](#) includes the Rockport Fitness Walking Test. You can do this anytime when you want to check in and see if your overall fitness has improved, stayed the same (this is not a bad thing, as it is not declining), or declined. Always warm-up before, and cool-down/stretch after moderate and vigorous intensity exercise. Eat the Med Way! It offers so many benefits, and can reduce your risk for cardiovascular disease by 30 to 60%.

Week 2: Walking posture and technique matter. Practice simple ways to boost energy. Start your day with a good breakfast.

How Long Does it Take to Lose Fitness?

You have made conscious choices to eat better and move more these past 8 weeks. Hopefully these positive lifestyle changes continue for you. So, what happens if you hit the “pause” button on your physical activity routine? It depends. Most of you likely fall into the category of a recreational exerciser, and it would take 2 to 4 weeks of inactivity before you see real change in your fitness level.

If you stop exercising, the first change you will notice is a decline in your aerobic fitness. You’ll get out of breath more quickly when climbing stairs or walking longer distances. While cardio conditioning falls faster than strength, it is easier to regain. It is also important to remember that taking time off from exercise, occasionally, can be a good thing, and a good exercise routine includes rest days.

The effect of inactivity on your muscle strength and endurance will be slight during the first few weeks. After that, your muscles won’t feel as firm, and you will notice a decline in muscle strength. The effect inactivity has on your waistline is based on input and output. When you exercise, you burn more calories to avoid weight gain.

Other factors play a role in how quickly you lose health benefits after you stop exercising. When comparing adults who were either 20 to 30 years old or 65 to 75 years old, the older adults lost fitness gains almost twice as fast as the younger set. The good news is that if you have fallen out of your activity routine, you can regain fitness and health benefits simply by being active again.

The Walk Kansas program is designed to be a catalyst for change — to nudge you to be more active for at least 8 weeks. Hopefully, you have noticed that you feel better when you are active every day. This feeling is called “intrinsic” motivation. Because you feel better, you are motivated to continue a more active lifestyle. Your motivation to be active is internal (how you feel) rather than external (motivated by prizes or things). Internal motivation is much more powerful, and the lifestyle changes you make, as a result, will last longer.



Week 3: Walking and other types of aerobic activity provide many benefits, but they don’t make your muscles stronger. Strength training does. Stress your bones just a little by doing small hops, marching, or heel drops. Jarring your bones a little will send a signal, and your body will respond by creating fresh new bone. Eat superfoods for your bones.

Week 4: Getting 30 minutes of exercise each day is important, but so is moving every 30 to 60 minutes. Find ways to [sit less and move more!](#) Squats are one of the best strengthening exercises you can do. Beans and legumes might just be the world’s #1 longevity food!

Week 5: Your brain and your gut have a super strong connection. Adopt habits that support good gut health. (This [webinar](#) offers more detail.) Stretch and strengthen your hip flexors. Choose foods that support your gut.

Week 6: If it’s good for your heart, it’s good for your brain. Self-care isn’t selfish. Nutritious meals can be simple.

Week 7: Weed for wellness by practicing good body mechanics. Stretch every day. Practice Kindness at Work. Eat seasonally.

Week 8: Add intervals (exercise snacks) to boost fitness and burn more calories. Stretch and strengthen your upper body. Seafood deserves a place on your plate at least twice each week.

Make your personal health a priority — enjoy an active, healthful summer!

Raise a Glass to Wellness!

A glass of water is one of the most refreshing beverages. Water helps regulate body temperature, lubricate joints, transport nutrients, and remove waste. Even mild dehydration can lead to fatigue, headaches, dizziness, and decreased performance. When you're active or spending time in the heat, your body loses fluids more quickly through sweat — making it even more important to replace what you lose.

Staying hydrated doesn't have to be complicated, and small habits can make a big difference. Here are some tips:

Drink water regularly. Don't wait until you're thirsty. Sip water throughout the day.

Start early. Drinking water first thing in the morning helps rehydrate your body, kickstarts metabolism, supports digestion, and improves mental focus.

Carry a water bottle. Keep it within reach as a reminder to drink often and wash it daily.

Adjust for activity and heat. Drink more when you're exercising or spending time outdoors.

Check your urine color. Pale yellow usually means you're well hydrated; a darker color may signal you need more fluids.

Eat hydrating foods. Fruits and vegetables like watermelon, cucumbers, oranges, and strawberries have high water content.

With hot and humid weather coming, you should watch for signs of heat exhaustion, which can occur when you are dehydrated and have lost an excessive amount of water and salt through sweat. During heat exhaustion, your body can become overwhelmed by heat, and your sweat response can stop working

properly. Signs and symptoms commonly include: dizziness, weakness, muscle cramps, heavy sweating, nausea, headache, tiredness, fainting, and skin that is pale, cool, and moist.

When you recognize any symptoms of heat exhaustion, stop the activity and rest. Find shade, shelter, or a cool room. Drink cool, non-alcoholic beverages, splash yourself with cool water, and place a wet, cold towel around your neck. If heat exhaustion is left untreated, it can lead to heat stroke. This is a medical emergency and requires immediate treatment.

For a special summer treat that everyone can enjoy, try non-alcoholic sangria! You can use any combination of juice that you like and change with the seasons by using fruit that is in season. Raise a glass to toast your success in Walk Kansas this year — here's to feeling good, staying cool, and making every step count!

Summer Sangria

Makes 6 (12-ounce) servings

Ingredients:

Fresh lemon slices
Fresh lime slices
Fresh orange slices
Fresh blueberries
Fresh strawberries, sliced
3 cups white cranberry peach juice cocktail
1 cup cranberry juice
1 cup orange juice
½ cup lemon juice
¼ cup lime juice
4 cups seltzer water

Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Wash whole fruit by gently rubbing it under cold running water. Wash blueberries and strawberries in a basin of cool water; then remove the hull and stem from strawberries and slice them.
3. In a large pitcher, add the sliced fruit and whole blueberries. Add juices and stir well.
4. Refrigerate until ready to use.
5. Just before serving, add the seltzer water; mix well. Enjoy!

Nutrition Information per serving: 105 calories; 26 g carbohydrates; 24 g sugar; 26 mg sodium.

