

## Feature

### A Walk on the Beach

Lagunans explore the long-term health benefits of brisk walking while savoring the sights and sounds of Mother Nature.

By Peter A. Balaskas

Brisk walking has been catching the attentions of many health enthusiasts across the nation, so much so that in 2014, the US Surgeon General created Step It Up!, a special program that not only encourages people to increase their walking regimen, but also support community efforts in providing safe and accessible locations for those walkers, regardless of their age or body type. As Janelle Naess, owner of Laguna Beach Walks, points out, the program focuses on good health.

“The US Surgeon General says regular physical activity can reduce the burden of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers,” Janelle says. “He also states it can also help manage weight, prevent falls, reduce depression and may improve cognitive abilities.”

Not surprisingly, many locals and tourists alike in Laguna Beach have adopted this trend. The reason is simple: what better way to improve one’s health than walking at a fast pace while enjoying the sights and sounds that serve as the city’s spirit. Whether it is a stroll on Forest Drive in Downtown or gazing at a golden sunset from Pacific Coast Highway, brisk walking in Laguna is a treat for both body and soul.

## Young at Heart

Brisk walking is not necessarily only for young people. Just ask Dr. Jack Lynn of Time Defiance Fitness ([tdfit.com](http://tdfit.com)). Jack's passion in helping Lagunans strive to reach their fullest potential when it comes to physical fitness has been ongoing ever since he visited the city in 1982. Now, at 63 years old, his facility's mission for improved health has served as a boon for older customers physically, nutritionally and emotionally. And he feels that brisk walking serves as a primary tool for accomplishing this threefold path.

"I felt that I could offer a service to many individuals in the community that had been successful in business or professions and desired to be physically healthy enough to enjoy the opportunities that their financial successes availed them," Jack says. "Having practiced surgery, orthopedics, and pain and rehab medicine for 21 years, I felt confident that my skill set would offer advice, direction, and a personal example of how to retain our youthful activities as we all age."

When it comes to walking, Jack focuses on cardiovascular and strength training and how to make them work together within a certain period of time. He says that it's important for walkers to recognize their own ROM---range of motion---for the thigh, hamstring and calf muscles. The next step is to follow a walking posture that is both comfortable and helpful.

"Try this technique---if you're not self-conscious and don't mind some snickering observers---of lowering your hips by just four to six inches when you walk," he says.

"This will make you really exercise the thigh muscles and the 'glutes'."

When it comes to this technique, Jack suggests walking in a normal posture for 50 yards and then in the “lower” position for the next 50 yards, as well as performing alternating curls with a pair of weight-appropriate dumbbells to help build the triceps. For those that need additional stability while walking, Jack feels that walking Nordic style with poles is a good way to start out a steady program. Most importantly, it is essential for people to stretch before, during and after brisk walks in order to get the most of the exercise.

For those who are over 50 years old, Jack feels that it has less to do with chronological age and more on the condition of both muscles and joints, taking into consideration on the “impact compression” of brisk walking.

“Many people have---through sporting activities, injuries, genetics, etc.---compromised joint structures, and each individual should evaluate their healthy capabilities before engaging in a walking exercise program,” he says. “Some basics are to not walk so fast that you can’t carry on a continued conversation.”

He feels that keeping a heart rate at 65 to 80% of maximum for your age---which is calculated by taking 220 minus your age times 0.65 or 0.80---is optimal for an older walker. And the benefits for brisk walkers at any age are plentiful.

“The cells in the muscles will increase in strength and stamina...if properly exercised and given the right nutrients,” he says. “Improving the cardiovascular system is an obvious benefit, but also maintaining the strength, lubrication, and mobility of the joints.”

For those who have been inactive for a long period of time, brisk walking is the most effective way of starting an exercise program than jogging because it involves less comprehensive impact to knee and hip structures, which is also extremely beneficial to

those who are recovering from injuries. Jack says that as these body structures heal, brisk walking should be a part of an overall recovery fitness program that includes strength training. By applying this walking routine, the body not only improves in its cardiovascular condition, but it also maintains its muscle and bone density.

He also believes that the beginning walker should have written goals and to also wear a heart monitor, as well as download phone apps that track walking distance and provide a map of your route. And, of course, it is important to have fun with brisk walking while taking advantage of the sights and the diverse terrain that Laguna Beach offers.

“Laguna has every type of terrain available for any type of walking experience,” he says.

“We have level beaches with hard packed or loose sand to walk on and we have rolling hills to very steep terrain off of Dartmoor, Alta Laguna, El Moro at Crystal Cove and Aliso Creek Canyon and Wilderness Park.”

### Checking Out the Sights

For both young and older walkers who prefer to exercise while checking out the local sights, they only need to seek out Laguna Beach Walks ([lagunabeachwalks.com](http://lagunabeachwalks.com)), a group founded by Janelle which combines the health benefits of brisk walking with the pleasures of sight seeing in Laguna.

“For me, the benefits of walking in Laguna Beach are that I can get exercise while watching the sunset over the ocean, pass amazing works of art, and chat with locals and visitors I encounter,” Janelle says. “Being out and enjoying this charming seaside town is a great way build community and appreciate this historic artist colony.”

Janelle feels that any kind of walking exercise is beneficial for all ages, and she wholeheartedly agrees with the US Surgeon General's recommendation that adults should perform a moderate-intensity physical activity---such as walking---and vigorous-intensity activity---like jogging---every week.

“I do try and follow that recommendation, but when jogging, I have to concentrate on my breathing and where I'm going...watching out for curbs, cars and other pedestrians keep me busy,” Janelle says. “When I'm walking, I notice everything---the art, the flowers, the views. I'm more social with others and have time to literally stop to ‘smell the roses.’”

Laguna Beach Walks has a variety of walking tours for those who want to improve their health while enjoying the Laguna scenery. One popular tour is the Heisler Park Walk, where guests can stroll by manicured walking paths along the Laguna coast and taking in the ocean scenic views, artworks, coastal blooms, and restaurants, most notably the historic Urth Café, whose architectural design combines Swiss chalet-styling and Japanese curved bargeboards.

There are also the boutiques on the HIP District Walk, which also features the historical Pottery Shack, as well as the English Garden Fine Florals building, whose Tudor style architecture has graced Laguna since 1937. The Downtown Walk is a treat for city strollers as they walk throughout the Laguna streets from Broadway, Ocean and Forest Avenue, visiting all the shops, restaurants---such as the Normandy-styled Lumberyard Restaurant and the Mediterranean designed Firehouse---and especially the Laguna College of Art and Design for art lovers

But Janelle points out that while her guests are improving their health during her one-hour walking tours, it is visiting Laguna's most popular local architectural landmarks that enrich their souls. "One of the most recognizable and often photographed local landmark is our Lifeguard Tower at Main Beach, which was built in the 1920s," she says. "Another historical local landmark is a statue of 'The Greeter' at the Old Pottery Place, named after Eiler Larsen who stood on Coast Highway from the 1940s through the early 1970s and waved to all who passed by."

Brisk walkers can rest as they take in the scenic views from Monument Point in Heisler Park or Brooks Street lookout, where surfers and boogie boarders ride the waves, as well as local artists painting their latest mosaics. Coastal blooms serves as a treat for both the eyes as well as the nose, including red hot pokers that attract both butterflies and hummingbirds and the agave attenuata, also known as the foxtail plant.

For both Jack and Janelle, brisk walking will continue to be a part of their ever-evolving careers. As Jack continues to help train his older customers in maintaining their quality of life, Janelle will be sponsoring her Fitness Walk Up Park Avenue, which is a rigorous walking tour that includes views of Laguna's middle and high schools, modern style houses, caves and wildflowers that ends with an expansive ocean view at the top.

Regardless, brisk walking is more than a proactive exercise for the locals and tourists of Laguna Beach; it's a frame of mind and a path to a healthy lifestyle. "Laguna Beach is a walking town," Janelle says. "With congested streets and hilly topography, walking is the best mode of transportation in this small seaside artist colony."

## Sidebar

### Walking Tours

There are a variety of walking tours that would appeal to all ages, whether a short hike to a longer trek. Janelle shares that her favorite one-hour tour is the Heisler Park Walk, which begins at the Lifeguard Tower at the Main Street Boardwalk and ends at the Marlo Bartels Bench near the Laguna Art Museum. But for those brisk walkers who only want to stroll for fifteen minutes, she recommends starting at The Gazebo, south of the Las Brisas Mexican Restaurant on Cliff Drive. From there, people can go west to see the Grey Sculpture with Wings titled “2001/#1,” as well as the Gnarly Tree, the Rock Pile Carve bench, the Breaching Whale and amphitheatre, and then take the stairs to stop and gaze at the Semper Memento 9/11 memorial and the American Legion monument.

For a longer 30-minute tour, Jack’s favorites including hikes through Crystal Cove, Moulton Meadow across the fire road or Treasure Island in the park. But he strongly recommends the Dartmoor Boat Canyon Trail, which provides a steady uphill climb, resulting in the walkers being witness to beautiful sights. Beginning at the end of the Dartmoor Road, visitors can hike from the cul de sac up some inclines and flat terrain where there is a scenic view of the backcountry of Boat Canyon and Emerald Bay Canyon. After reaching the top of the ridge, hikers can make a left and follow a trail to a couple of benches where they can gaze at the Pacific Ocean from Can Clements to Palos Verdes.