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**SPECIAL ISSUE: WALKING IN L.A.**

## **There's walking and then there's specialty walking**

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For millions of years, we've been ambulating about on two legs. At this late stage, how could walking possibly offer up any out-of-the-ordinary thrills? Here's a sampler:

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### **Racewalking**

Believe it or not, racewalking used to make the news. In 1867, a New York Times article entitled "The Pedestrian Mania" discussed the latest craze for long-distance speed walking, comparing its practitioners with prizefighters and warning its readers against the sport's "possible risk to ... life." During a great media splash in 1910, the most famous of these "pedestrians," Edward Payson Weston, walked 3,500 miles from Santa Monica to New York City in a mere 78 days — and at the age of 71, no less.

Today, racewalking is an Olympic sport, and racewalkers in other countries, especially Italy, France, Mexico, China and Ecuador, still garner national attention. Not only are the racers fast — the best can cover 31 miles at a 7-minutes-per-mile pace — they're also beautiful to watch, says Elaine Ward, president of the North American Racewalking Foundation in Pasadena.

Those stereotypical rolling hips are there for a reason: By integrating their hips and legs, racewalkers can increase their stride length, engage their core body muscles and bring more power to their stride. (Even noncompetitive walkers can add a bit of this hip-rotation trick to make their walks stronger.)

With about 5,000 die-hard competitive walkers in the U.S. (including at least 19 race walking clubs in California), racewalking isn't about to overtake competitive running in popularity. But noncompetitive racewalking — such as walking a marathon to benefit charities — may be a different story. When Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training added marathon walking to its running program in 1996, there was a surge in participation, organizers say. Last year, walkers raised \$13.3 million for the society.

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### **Mall walking**

As shopping centers flourished in the 1980s, so sprang up a uniquely suburban fitness fad: mall walking. The benefits of exercising in a mall's man-made environment are clear: eternally perfect weather, no tricky curbs or intersections to navigate, handy benches and restrooms placed at regular intervals, friendly security guards, jazzy

piped-in music — and advance notice for upcoming sales.

Most malls don't seem to mind having a few dozen potential shoppers circling past their storefronts every morning. In fact, some partner with health organizations and open their doors to walking clubs in the wee hours of the morning. The Westside Walkers at L.A.'s Westside Pavilion and the Santa Monica Strutters at Santa Monica Place (both part of the UCLA Healthcare 50 Plus Program) have been around for more than 10 years.

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## **Pedometer walking**

Obsessively counting one's daily steps with a pedometer may be a recent hobby for some Americans, but the fad actually started in Japan 40 years ago. After Tokyo hosted the 1964 Olympics, the Japanese government set up walking clubs as a way to spread fitness among its citizens. In 1965 a Japanese pedometer manufacturer started selling the manpo-kei (literally, the 10,000-step meter) to help walkers track their progress.

The Japanese term, it turns out, also serves as a handy walking goal: some researchers believe that 10,000 steps a day is a reasonable, if slightly ambitious, target for most Americans, says David Bassett, professor of exercise, sport and leisure studies at University of Tennessee. (If you're logging fewer than 5,000 total steps a day, researchers deem you "sedentary"; more than 12,500 steps earns you the "highly active" gold star.)

Pedometers actually measure up-and-down changes when you walk: a tiny, spring-suspended lever inside the device bobs up and down when your heel strikes the ground, and electronic circuitry then counts each step.

A study in 2003 tested seven commercial pedometers and found some to be as accurate to within 3% of step counts — or as far off as 37%, depending on the quality. Another study in 2003 concluded that pedometers are most accurate for counting steps, less accurate for measuring how far you've walked — and less accurate still for figuring out how many calories you've burned along the way.