

health REPORT CARD

Forgetting to floss. Sleeping with your contacts in. When it comes to healthy living, nobody's perfect. But just how harmful are those not-so-great habits? Find out how they measure up.

BY BARBARA BRODY



A- WALKING IS MY ONLY EXERCISE.

You can feel pretty good about this one—as long as you do it enough. Walking at least 30 minutes, five days a week, might reduce your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and breast cancer. The reason for the minus? You're missing out on the benefits of other forms of exercise, says **Panteleimon Ekkekakis, Ph.D.**, associate professor of kinesiology at Iowa State University. For a truly comprehensive fitness program, you'll need resistance training to build muscle mass, and flexibility work (stretching, yoga, pilates).

For an A+, Ekkekakis suggests varying your pace (add bursts of speed walking to a moderate stroll), stretching as you warm up and cool down, and working with free weights or resistance bands for 15 minutes.

B I DON'T GET A CHECKUP EVERY YEAR.

You're probably OK, especially if you're under 50 and healthy—no smoking, lots of fruits and vegetables, daily exercise. “The majority of our long-term health depends on our everyday habits,” says Henry Lodge, M.D., professor of medicine at Columbia University Medical Center in New York. His advice: Aim for a checkup every five years in your 20s, every three in your 30s, and every two in your 40s. Once you hit 50, go annually. “That’s when you can discuss how your diet, stress, and exercise habits may be impacting your risk of heart disease, diabetes, and other conditions,” Lodge says. Also go yearly if you have a family history of any of those conditions, regardless of age.

C+ I WEAR FLATS EVERYWHERE.

Look, we get you—they're easy to walk in, easy to pack. But they're not easy on your body. Especially if you're doing a lot of walking, flats shouldn't be your everyday shoes, says Megan Leahy, D.P.M., a podiatrist and spokesperson for the American Podiatric Medical Association. “They typically don't give you support or cushioning,” she says. In flats, your feet are subjected to excess stress and pressure, which can lead to pain in your feet, knees, hips, and back.

We're not saying stilettos are the answer, but you should look for a heel height of at least 1 inch. And when you do wear flats, choose shoes with somewhat rigid soles, which means they provide some support. How to tell? Use the “twist and bend” test: If they twist or bend easily, pick another pair.



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK