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Keeping your New Year's resolution on track
American Heart Association creates online walking community

DALLAS (date) — Just in time to help you keep your New Year's resolution, the American Heart Association has created an online community of virtual walking buddies, or “sole-mates”.

The MyStart! Online Community encourages walkers to connect with others — whether from the neighborhood or on the other side of the country — to stay on track with a walking program.

“For some time, research has indicated that individuals are far more likely to stick with an exercise regimen if someone else is counting on them,” said Timothy Gardner, M.D., president of the American Heart Association, alluding to a **recent survey that revealed American adults are 76 percent more likely to walk if someone else is counting on them.**

“The MyStart! Online Community makes it easier than ever to facilitate those important connections. Even though the connections are virtual, they still play an important role in providing companionship, motivation and accountability.”

The online tool is part of Start!, the American Heart Association's national initiative that calls on Americans to live longer, heart-healthier lives by walking.

The technology allows members of the community to check up on each other and provide support and encouragement when they need a push, or congratulations when they reach a goal.

The community also includes a tracker to allow members to record distance, map routes and keep an ongoing log of walks taken. Mileage can be logged and recorded on www.heart.org/start.

“Accountability is a common theme seen in successful exercise programs, and the American Heart Association's MyStart! Online Community not only enables you to find a buddy and be accountable to each other, but it allows you to be accountable to yourself should you choose to track and post your information,” Gardner said. “It is a badge of honor to show the world your exercise accomplishments, and that confidence helps in encouraging you to tackle your next big walk.”

The American Heart Association champions walking because it has the lowest dropout rate out of any physical activity, and it can be done anywhere at any time.

Studies have shown walking can help reduce stress, provide more energy and enhance mental well-being. Research also shows that 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day can reduce your risk of coronary disease, improve blood pressure and blood sugar levels, help maintain body weight, lower your risk of obesity and reduce the risk of osteoporosis, breast and color cancer and type 2 diabetes.

Furthermore, for every hour of regular vigorous exercise, such as very brisk walking, some adults may gain up to two hours of life expectancy, according to another study.

Start! is sponsored nationally by SUBWAY® Restaurants, Healthy Choice® and AstraZeneca.

For more information, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit www.heart.org/start.

About the American Heart Association

Founded in 1924, the American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary health organization dedicated to building healthier lives, free of heart disease and stroke. These diseases, America's No. 1 and No. 3 killers, and all other cardiovascular diseases claim nearly 870,000 lives a year. In fiscal year 2007-2008, the association invested nearly \$560 million in research, professional and public education, and advocacy and community service programs to help all Americans live longer, healthier lives. To learn more, call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or visit americanheart.org.

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