

## Popular Walk Kansas program gears up for 2023

Eight week challenge focuses on physical activity, healthy eating

Walking or running or biking more than 400 miles across the state of Kansas over the next eight weeks would seem a bit intimidating to most folks.

Yet, an estimated 5,000 people in Kansas and beyond are gearing up to do just that as part of a popular program that kicks off on March 26.

[Walk Kansas](#), a team-based challenge that encourages teams of six to exercise and live more healthfully while working toward a common goal, will run through May 20. [Registration is available online](#) through the end of March. The cost is \$10 per person.

“When we created Walk Kansas in 2001, we were looking at the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#), which recommend a minimum 150 minutes of activity per week,” said Sharolyn Jackson, a K-State Research and Extension northeast area specialist and the state leader for Walk Kansas for more than two decades.

“So we determined that if six people would collectively meet the minimum guidelines of physical activity, they could virtually walk across the state of Kansas, which is 423 miles, in about eight weeks.”

Jackson said many forms of activity count toward “miles” accumulated. She said miles are calculated based on minutes of activity, with adjustments for moderate or vigorous forms of activity. To reach 150 minutes a week, she urges participants to make a goal to exercise 20-30 minutes per day.

“We count any type of activity that gets your heart beating a little bit faster, or exerting energy to where you can carry on a conversation just barely, but you can’t sing; that’s the moderate intensity level,” she said. “And vigorous activity also gives real benefits, such as short bursts of 30 seconds to a minute while you’re walking; you can kind of gauge vigorous exercise by whether you can say a few words but not really carry on a conversation.”

This year’s program offers four Walk Kansas routes:

- Route 1 is 435 miles past Eight Wonders of Kansas. An online map shows team members some of the sights they’ll pass as they work toward their goal. Teams can reach this goal by meeting the minimum guideline of 150 minutes per week for each team member.
- Route 2 is new this year – and actually begins in New Mexico. The distance covered is 640 miles and requires 200 minutes per week for each team member.
- Route 3 challenges teams to cover 764 miles, beginning in the northeast corner of Kansas and finishing in the southwest corner. It requires about 240 minutes of exercise per week for each team member.
- Route 4 is called the Little Balkans route, beginning in southeast Kansas to Nicodemus, with numerous turns. Those teams ambitious enough to take on this challenge will cover 1,200 miles – or six hours of exercise per week, per person.

There is also a solo trail for those who don't have a team, or just prefer to take on the challenge themselves. Participants do not have to live in Kansas to be on a team or to do the solo challenge.

In addition to tracking their minutes of activity, participants can report the number of cups of fruits and vegetables and, optionally, water they consume weekly. Participants are also encouraged to add in some type of strength exercise at least two days per week.

From April 2 through May 14 – Weeks 2 through 7 of Walk Kansas – Jackson said organizers will offer a weekly webinar on healthy eating, focusing on the Mediterranean eating style. The course is called 'Med Instead of Meds,' to reflect the goal to help participants learn ways to potentially replace medications with healthy eating.

More information about Walk Kansas also is available at any of the Twin Creeks Extension offices.