

RUNNER'S WORLD

After an Unexpected Trip to the Hospital, This Mom Started Walking and Lowered Her Resting Heart Rate

At 74, Veronica Young doesn't have plans to slow down. In fact, she's just getting started.

BY VERONICA YOUNG, AS TOLD TO EMILY SHIFFER
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Name: Veronica Young

Age: 74

Hometown: San Diego, California

Occupation: Retired Human Geneticist

Time Running: I began walking in May 2021, and have completed 176 classes at STRIDE.

Reason for Running: I walk for my heart health, and am motivated by my daughter, Kathy. She was my first “coach!”

In December 2020, I knew something was wrong with my heart. No matter what I did, I could not get my heart rate to fall below 190 beats per minute (bpm). It felt like my heart was beating into my throat, and I was always exhausted. I had lots of heart palpitations and felt like I was having a heart attack.

I come from a family of firefighters, so I went to my local fire station to receive help. I was immediately taken to the hospital, where doctors confirmed with an EKG that I had a shockingly high resting heart rate of 190—that's when I was diagnosed with supraventricular tachycardia (an irregularly fast heartbeat).

As a result, I had to have surgery, a catheter ablation, which uses energy to make small scars in your heart tissue to prevent abnormal electrical signals from moving through your heart. It was a minimally invasive transcatheter structural heart surgery. This involves guiding a long, thin, flexible tube called a catheter to your heart through blood vessels that can be accessed from the groin.

After having surgery and resting for a few months, I started my recovery process. Although I wanted to start running, my doctors suggested I start with walking. I walked around my neighborhood to begin with, to build up my energy and muscles.

In May 2021, I started attending classes at my local STRIDE fitness studio, and began my walking journey. There is a STRIDE studio located in my condo building, and since they give you your first class free, I decided to try it. My first workout was really tough, with no recovery periods. I truly thought, "I can't do this!" I whined about how awful I felt and told my daughter "I'm quitting!" My daughter encouraged me to try STRIDE for one full month. My son-in-law strongly told me to add recovery periods on the treadmill.

Having my daughter join me in STRIDE workouts really helped me keep going. The coaching staff was also excellent with advice, explanations, and very loud music to keep pace with each workout. Coaches also taught us to take deep breaths, hold it, and release slowly. This helped bring my heart rate down during recovery time on the treadmill. It works.

I'm not running just yet, but my doctor has encouraged me to give it a try soon. I walk on different inclines and speeds, as well as intervals. And I also take part in different walking challenges at the studio, like the eight-week VO2 Max Challenge which included an additional speed class each week. I was surprised at how much energy I gained during the eight weeks of preparation.

Right now, walking with a heart rate monitor has allowed me to measure my heart rate and pace myself. I purchased one of the chest strap heart rate monitors and use

it in addition to my Apple Watch. I recognize when I am not recovered, and can accurately make adjustments based on what my heart rate is doing.

I use my STRIDE app to check into class and track my progress. By tracking my progress on the monitors in each class, I saw my heart rate improve and pulse rate go down little by little. I have lowered my resting heart rate to 62. I also keep track of my body mass index, cardiac fitness including VO2 max, active energy, steps, and workouts on my watch's monthly calendar. The Apple Watch is a gift to myself so I can see my daily exercise rings, miles walked, and weekly miles.

Now, I walk three to four times a week and see a physical therapist. My physical therapist has assigned a list of exercises for me to complete outside of my STRIDE classes. I also use the fitness center in my building where I utilize machines and weights for strength training. My goal is to run/walk a 5K.

Walking coupled with physical therapy has completely changed my life! I have not fallen once in over a year. (I also have inner ear vertigo, and I was referred to a vestibular physical therapist who is treating me for inner ear crystals.)

My goals right now are to relieve the dizziness, keep my balance and strength, keep exercising and avoid falling. I'm not afraid anymore of falling because my walking, standing and balancing movements are strong, focused, and deliberate.

I also have a newfound awareness of my body. I also have better lower body strength, which can be credited to working with inclines on the treadmill and strength training, better VO2 max after the eight-week challenge at my studio, and better mobility.

These tips have made my walking journey a success:

1. Get a good coach

I cannot brag enough about the coaches at STRIDE. I like having someone tell me what to do. I appreciate their insight and modifications. It's much easier to train under the guidance of a coach whether you're walking, jogging, or running.

2. Seek support and a workout buddy

I work out with my daughter, Kathy. Having someone to work out with has helped me a lot to stay accountable. I enjoy the group fitness setting too.

3. Understand your body's nutritional needs

I have loved learning how many calories my body burns in an exercise session. It has helped me to make optimal food choices.

4. Create a schedule

Do not give up, keep going. Dictate your schedule around your workout schedule. Make exercise your priority. Your body will thank you.

Veronica's Must-Have Gear

→**Lululemon Run Times Sports Bra:** It keeps everything in place.

→**Lux Fit Foam Roller:** This is great for recovery and rolling out tight muscles.

→**Gaiam Essentials Premium Yoga Mat:** This is also great to have to roll out for stretching and recovery, or if you want to include a yoga session in your workout routine.