

Walking- A Step in the Right Direction

Have you been thinking of adding more physical activity to your life? Starting a walking program may be a great way to be more active. And walking on a regular basis may lead to many health benefits. This brochure will give you tips on how to make walking a part of your daily routine.

What are the benefits of walking?

Walking is the most popular physical activity among adults. Taking a walk is low cost and doesn't require any special clothes or equipment.

Walking may

- lower your risk of health problems like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes
- strengthen your bones and muscles
- help you burn more calories
- lift your mood

Make walking fun by going to places you enjoy, like a park or shopping center. Bring along a friend or family member to chat with, or listen to some of your favorite music as you walk. Keep the volume low so that you can hear noises around you.

Do I need to see a doctor first?

Most people do not need to see a doctor before they start a walking program. But if you answer "yes" to any of the questions below, check with your doctor first.

- Has your doctor told you that you have heart trouble, diabetes, or asthma?
- When you are physically active, do you have pains in your chest, neck, shoulder, or arm?
- Do you often feel faint or have dizzy spells?
- Do you feel very breathless after physical activity?
- Do you have bone or joint problems, like arthritis, that make it difficult for you to walk?
- Are you over 40 years old and have you recently been inactive?
- Do you have a health problem that might keep you from starting a walking program?

How do I start?

1. Make a plan

The following questions may help you get started:

- Where will you walk?
- How often will you walk?
- Who will walk with you?
- How far or for how long will you walk?

2. Get ready

Make sure you have anything you may need. Here are some examples:

- shoes with proper arch support, a firm heel, and thick flexible soles
- clothes that keep you dry and comfortable
- a hat or visor for the sun, sunscreen, and sunglasses
- a hat and scarf to cover your head and ears when it's cold outside

3. Go

Divide your walk into three parts:

- Warm up by walking slowly.
- Increase your speed to a brisk walk. This means walking fast enough to raise your heart rate while still being able to speak and breathe easily.
- Cool down by slowing down your pace.

When walking, be sure to use proper form:

- Keep your chin up and your shoulders slightly back.
- Let the heel of your foot touch the ground first, and then roll your weight forward.
- Walk with your toes pointed forward.
- Swing your arms naturally.

4. Add more

As walking becomes easier, walk faster and go farther. Keep track of your progress with a walking journal or log. Record date, time, and distance. Set goals and reward yourself with a relaxing shower or 30 minutes of quiet time to yourself.

Review the sample walking plan for suggestions on how to start and slowly increase walking.

What about safety?

Keep safety in mind as you plan when and where you will walk.

- Walk with others, when possible, and take a phone and ID with you.
- Let your family and friends know your walking time and route.
- If it is dark outside, wear a reflective vest or brightly colored clothing.
- Be aware of your surroundings.

How can I make walking a habit?

The key to building any habit is to stick with the new behavior. Having a regular walking buddy may help keep you going—even on days when you would rather stay home. You can cheer each other on and serve as role models for friends, family members, and others.

When barriers come up, like time demands or bad weather, think of ways to beat them, like walking inside of a shopping center. If you have a setback, start again as soon as you can. With time, walking will become a part of your daily routine and may make it easier to try other types of physical activity.

How much do I need to walk?

150 minutes.

Amount of time adults need per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (activity that speeds up your heart rate and breathing) to stay healthy.

Break it down.

30 minutes per day x 5 days per week = 150 minutes per week

Walking briskly for 30 minutes per day, 5 days a week will help you meet this goal. But any 10-minute bout of physical activity helps.

Split it up.

10 minutes + 10 minutes + 10 minutes = 30 minutes

If you can't walk for 30 minutes at a time, you can take three 10-minute walks instead.

Step it up.

For more health benefits and to control your weight, you may need to walk more. Aim for 300 minutes each week, or about 1 hour a day for 5 days. The more you walk, the more health benefits you may gain!

Should I stretch before I walk?

Most experts advise stretching only after you have warmed up. To warm up, walk slowly for a few minutes before picking up the pace.

Stretching gently at the end of your walk may help build flexibility. Do not bounce or hold your breath when you stretch. Do each stretch slowly and move only as far as you feel comfortable.

If you think that stretching before walking may help you, ask your doctor when and how to do so safely. You may want to discuss these exercises as examples

Side Reach



Reach one arm over your head and to the side. Keep your hips steady and your shoulders straight to the side. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat on the other side.

Wall Push



Lean your hands on a wall and place your feet about 3 to 4 feet away from the wall. Bend one knee and point it toward the wall. Keep your back leg straight with your foot flat and your toes pointed straight ahead. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with the other leg.

Knee Pull



Lean your back against a wall. Keep your head, hips, and feet in a straight line. Pull one knee toward your chest, hold for 10 seconds, and then repeat with the other leg.

Leg Curl



Pull your right foot toward your buttocks with your right hand. Stand straight and keep your bent knee pointing straight down. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with your other foot and hand.

Hamstring Stretch



Sit on a sturdy bench or hard surface so that one leg is stretched out on the bench with your toes pointing up. Keep your other foot flat on the surface below. Straighten your back, and if you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh, hold for 10 seconds and then change sides and repeat. If you do not feel a stretch, slowly lean forward from your hips until you feel a stretch.

A Sample Daily Walking Program

This program is only a guide. Your walking sessions may be longer or shorter based on your ability and the advice of your doctor. If you are walking fewer than three times per week, give yourself more than 2 weeks before adding more.

Warm-up Time <i>Walk Slowly</i>	Brisk-walk Time	Cool-down Time <i>Walk Slowly and Stretch</i>	Total Time
WEEKS 1–2			
5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	15 minutes
WEEKS 3–4			
5 minutes	10 minutes	5 minutes	20 minutes
WEEKS 5–6			
5 minutes	15 minutes	5 minutes	25 minutes
WEEKS 7–8			
5 minutes	20 minutes	5 minutes	30 minutes
WEEKS 9–10			
5 minutes	25 minutes	5 minutes	35 minutes

WEEKS 11–12			
5 minutes	30 minutes	5 minutes	40 minutes
WEEKS 13–14			
5 minutes	35 minutes	5 minutes	45 minutes
WEEKS 15–16			
5 minutes	40 minutes	5 minutes	50 minutes
WEEKS 17–18			
5 minutes	45 minutes	5 minutes	55 minutes
WEEKS 19–20			
5 minutes	50 minutes	5 minutes	60 minutes

Information Provided By: <http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/walking.htm>

