



Walking For Health

Walking can reduce your risk of heart disease. It can also help you maintain a healthy weight, which helps keep you well. Walking is easy to do, and easy to fit into your schedule. The following are a few tips that will get you off on the right foot!

What to wear

- Start with a comfortable well-fitted walking shoe. A reputable shoe store can help you choose a pair. Look for snug arch support and lateral stability for firm footing. And remember to buy your walking shoes so that they fit properly to your larger foot, since most people have one foot that is slightly bigger than the other.
- Choose socks that you like. You may prefer thick ones for a snug fit, which means less friction. Or maybe you like thin ones, to fight off the moisture. Steer clear of cotton socks, which soak up perspiration, and wear socks made with fibers that draw moisture away from your skin.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes. In colder temperatures, wear layers that you can take off as you warm up.

How to get going

- Start with a modest goal, like 15 to 20 minutes at a leisurely pace.
- Your walk should be comprised of three segments: warm-up, exercise pace and cool-down.
- **To warm up:**
 - Walk the first 5 minutes at a reduced pace, about 50% your maximum effort.
 - Then pause and do some stretches. Focus on your calves, front of thigh (quadriceps), back of thigh (hamstrings) and lower back. Stretching not only feels great, but it keeps your body flexible and it may help prevent injuries. Remember: stretching is only effective once your muscles are warm, and stretches should be gradual and sustained. Hold each for 30 seconds and never bounce or force movements.
 - After stretching, walk at an exercise pace. On average, brisk walking for 1 mile can range, depending on your age and general condition, from 15 to 20 minutes, or about 3 to 4 miles per hour. Remember: Never exert yourself beyond feeling as if you are doing "moderate" work. A good test is that you should be able to carry on a conversation while you walk.
 - Keep your shoulders back and relaxed, and let your arms swing naturally.
 - Remember that your heel should strike the ground first, and that you should push off with your toe.
 - Try to keep an even stride and maintain a steady pace.

- The last 5 minutes of your walk, gradually slow down to your warm-up pace. Then, finish with a few more stretches. Stretching after you walk gives your body time to cool down and your muscles a chance to relax. It also helps your heart return gradually to a normal rate.

Pick up the pace...

Improving cardiovascular benefit

- Gradually, perhaps on a weekly basis, add 5 minutes to the brisk part of your walk. Keep the stretches as part of your routine.
- Once you're walking for 30 minutes or more, try to increase the distance you go; for example, a block at a time within the same time frame.
- For optimal fitness, exercise at the brisk pace of your walk for a minimum of 20 minutes, four times a week.
- If you miss a workout, take advantage of daily opportunities to exercise: take the stairs instead of the elevator at work, park further from the mall entrance or get up from your chair during TV commercials (to put clothes in the dryer - not to go to the fridge!)

How to Avoid injury

- Most injuries are caused by inconsistency. The key is to increase the intensity and duration of your walk in a gradual, progressive manner. You may have sore muscles especially when you first start a walking program. The soreness should decrease in 24 to 48 hours.
- Guard against walking too much, too soon - specifically, walking too fast a pace early in your program.
- If you stop for a few weeks, don't expect to resume at the speed at which you stopped.
- Remember to stretch!
- Be sure to replace worn shoes. When you start to see wear at the heel, especially if it's uneven, it's time to get a new pair. If you see significant wearing, it's past time!

Walking offers endless health benefits

- **Keeps your heart healthy.** Physical activity lowers your blood pressure, increases the amount of "good" cholesterol in your blood and helps prevent against heart attack. Being fit also lowers your risk of diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure and other health problems.
- **Boosts your energy.** Walking gives you a greater capacity for work and helps you deal better with daily stress.
- **Improves your sleep.** Walking helps you fall asleep easier and gives you a more restful sleep.
- **Keeps your bones healthy.** Walking can help protect against and lessen the effects of osteoporosis, or "porous bone disease." Walking and other exercises that force you to work against gravity help strengthen your bones.

Important information

If you are over 40 and have never before exercised, be sure to check with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.