

### Walking Poses Few Health Risks

Walking actually has proven to be more effective than running and other more highly-touted activities. That's because it's virtually injury-free and has the lowest dropout rate of any form of exercise.

If you are free of serious health problems, you can start walking with confidence. Walking is not as strenuous as running, bicycling, or swimming and consequently involves almost no risk to health. Of course, this statement assumes that you will exercise good judgment and not try to exceed the limits of your condition.

Listen to your body when you walk. If you develop dizziness, pain, nausea, or any other unusual symptom, slow down or stop. If the problem persists, see your physician before walking again.

Don't try to compete with others when walking. Even individuals of similar age and build vary widely in their capacity for exercise. Your objective should be to steadily improve your own performance, not to walk farther or faster than someone else.

The most important thing is simply to set aside part of each day and walk. No matter what your age or condition, it's a practice that can make you healthier and happier.

Most health care providers recommend annual physical examinations for persons over 40 or 45 years of age. Also, if you have high blood pressure or other cardiovascular problems, you should consult your health care provider before beginning any kind of exercise program.

Please complete the following screener to determine if you should consult your health care provider before beginning a fitness program:

### PAR-Q

	YES	NO
1. Has your doctor ever said you have heart trouble?		
2. Do you frequently have pains in your heart or chest?		
3. Do you often feel faint or have spells of severe dizziness?		
4. Has your doctor ever said your blood pressure was too high?		
5. Has your doctor ever told you that you have a bone or joint problem such as arthritis that has been aggravated by exercise, or might be made worse with exercise?		
6. Is there a good physical reason not mentioned here why you should not follow an activity program even if you want to?		
7. Are you over the age of 65 and not accustomed to vigorous exercise?		
<b>If YES to 3 or more, needs to be referred to see their health care provider before starting exercise program.</b>		

8. Has a doctor ever told you that you should not exercise?		
9. Is there any reason (physical) why you could not participate in light to moderate exercise which will progress toward the goal of 3-5 days per week for 30 minutes?		
<b>If YES to one of the above (8&amp;9), needs to be referred to see their health care provider before starting exercise program.</b>		

### What to Wear When Walking

A good pair of shoes is the only "special equipment" required by the walker. Any shoes that are comfortable, provide good support, and don't cause blisters or calluses will do, but here are some suggestions to help you make your selection:

- Good running shoes (the training models with heavy soles) are good walking shoes, as are some of the lighter trail and hiking boots and casual shoes with heavy rubber or crepe rubber soles.
- Whatever kind of shoe you select, it should have arch supports and should elevate the heel one-half to three-quarters of an inch above the sole of the foot.
- Choose a shoe with uppers made of materials that "breathe," such as leather or nylon mesh.
- Link to ["how to select a walking shoe"](#)

Weather will dictate the rest of your attire. As a general rule, you will want to wear lighter clothing than temperatures seem to indicate. Walking generates lots of body heat. In cold weather, it's better to wear several layers of light clothing than one or two heavy layers. The extra layers help trap heat, and they are easy to shed if you get too warm. A wool watch cap or ski cap also will help trap body heat and provide protection for the head in very cold temperatures.

It is also a good idea to carry a bottle of water with you. What you need depends on individual sweating rates, body size and weight, heat and humidity, and walking speed, and other factors. The following are some general hydration tips, courtesy of McKinley Health Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:

- ◆ Drink one to two glasses of water when you get up in the morning.
- ◆ Keep a water bottle with you throughout the day.
- ◆ Drink one to two cups of fluid 30 minutes before exercise.
- ◆ Drink 1/2 to 1 cup of fluid for each 15 minutes of exercise.
- ◆ Replenish lost fluids after workouts (2 1/2 cups for every pound lost).
- ◆ Water is fine for lower-intensity exercise lasting 45 minutes or less. Sports drinks are a better option for higher-intensity exercise lasting 45 minutes or more.

### Warm up

Warming up prepares the body for physical activity – it prevents a rapid increase in blood pressure, improves blood flow to the heart, increases muscle temperature and makes muscles more pliable. By warming up, you will improve their performance and reduce the risk of injury. A pre-exercise warm-up:

- warms your muscles by increasing the movement of blood through your tissues, making the muscles more supple;
- increases delivery of oxygen and nutrients to your muscles by increasing the blood flow to them;
- prepares your muscles for stretching;
- prepares your heart for an increase in activity;
- prepares you mentally for the upcoming exercise; and primes your nerve-to-muscle pathways to be ready for exercise.

The warm-up is widely viewed as a simple measure to help prevent injury during exercise. While scientific studies are ongoing to define the best warm-up techniques to gain this injury-prevention advantage, the warm-up in general is firmly established as a key to exercising safely and effectively.

#### Ensuring an effective warm up

To make your warm up effective, you need to do movements that increase your heart rate and breathing, and slightly increase the temperature of your muscle tissue. A good indication is warming up to the point where you have raised a light sweat.

- ◆ If you're exercising for general fitness, allow 5 to 10 minutes for your pre-exercise warm-up (or slightly longer in cold weather).
- ◆ If you are exercising at a higher level than for general fitness, or have a particular sporting goal in mind, you may need a longer warm-up, and one that is designed specifically for your sport.

To begin your warm-up do 5 minutes of light (low intensity) physical activity such as walking, jogging on the spot or on a trampoline. Pump your arms or make large but controlled circular movements with your arms to help warm the muscles of your upper body.

#### **Stretching Exercises**

Any stretching is best performed after your muscles are warm, so only stretch after your warm-up or during your cool down. Stretching muscles when they are cold may lead to a tear. Static stretching (stretching a muscle and holding it in this position without discomfort for 10-30 seconds) is considered the safest method of stretching.

Perform a light static stretching routine at the end of your warm up or the beginning of your cool down by stretching each of the muscle groups you will be using in your chosen activity. A static stretch should be held at the point where you can feel the stretch but do not experience any discomfort. If you feel discomfort, ease back on the stretch. Remember not to bounce when holding the stretch. Don't spend so long doing your stretches that your muscles cool down and your heart rate returns to normal. It is better to keep most of your static stretching for *after* your exercise session, that is, after your cool-down.

- ◆ Stretcher Stand facing wall arms' length away. Lean forward and place palms of hands flat against wall, slightly below shoulder height. Keep back straight, heels

firmly on floor, and slowly bend elbows until forehead touches wall. Tuck hips toward wall and hold position for 20 seconds. *Repeat exercise with knees slightly flexed.*

- ◆ **Reach and Bend** Stand erect with feet shoulder-width apart and arms extended over head. Reach as high as possible while keeping heels on floor and hold for 10 counts. Flex knees slightly and bend slowly at waist, touching floor between feet with fingers. Hold for 10 counts (If you can't touch the floor, try to touch the tops of your shoes.) *Repeat entire sequence 2 to 5 times.*
- ◆ **Knee Pull** Lie flat on back with legs extended and arms at sides. Lock arms around legs just below knees and pull knees to chest, raising buttocks slightly off floor. Hold for 10 to 15 counts. (If you have knee problems, you may find it easier to lock arms behind knees.) *Repeat exercise 3 to 5 times.*
- ◆ **Situp** Several versions of the sit-up are listed in reverse order of difficulty (easiest one listed first, most difficult one last). Start with the sit-up that you can do three times without undue strain. When you are able to do 10 repetitions of the exercise without great difficulty, move on to a more difficult version.
  1. Lie flat on back with arms at sides, palms down, and knees slightly bent. Cud head forward until you can see past feet, hold for three counts, then lower to start position. *Repeat exercise 3 to 10 times.*
  2. Lie flat on back with arms at sides, palms down, and knees slightly bent. Roll forward until upper body is at 45-degree angle to floor, then return to starting position. *Repeat exercise 3 to 10 times.*
  3. Lie flat on back with arms at sides, palms down, and knees slightly bent. Roll forward to sitting position, then return to starting position. *Repeat exercise 3 to 10 times.*
  4. Lie flat on back with arms crossed on chest and knees slightly bent. Roll forward to sitting position, then return to starting position. *Repeat exercise 3 to 10 times.*
  5. Lie flat on back with hands laced in back of head and knees slightly bent. Roll forward to sitting position, then return to starting position. *Repeat exercise 3 to 15 times.*

### **Cool Down**

Cooling down and stretching after exercise may reduce the risk of injuries happening. It also helps to promote flexibility. This low-intensity exercise should last for 5-15 minutes and include activity such as slow jogging and stretching.

The practice of cooling down after exercise means slowing down your level of activity gradually. Cooling down:

- helps your heart rate and breathing to return towards normal gradually;
- helps avoid fainting or dizziness, which can result from blood pooling in the large muscles of the legs when vigorous activity is stopped suddenly;
- helps prepare your muscles for the next exercise session, whether it's the next day or in a few days' time; and
- helps to remove waste products from your muscles, such as lactic acid, which can build up during vigorous activity.

You may see conflicting advice as to whether cooling down prevents post-exercise muscle soreness, also known as delayed-onset muscle soreness (DOMS). However, even if cooling down doesn't prevent DOMS, the other benefits of cooling down mean that you should always make it a part of your exercise session.

#### Ensuring an effective cool-down

For an effective cool-down:

- perform low intensity exercise for a minimum of 5 to 10 minutes; and
- follow this with a stretching routine (link to [stretching exercises](#)).

Continuing your chosen exercise while gradually slowing its intensity. Gradually slowing down the pace and exertion of your activity over several minutes can seem a natural progression, as well as fulfilling the need to include a cool-down period at the end of your exercise.

#### Stretching after your cool-down

The best time to stretch is after your cool-down, as at this time your muscles are still warm and most likely to respond favorably and there is a low risk of injury. Stretching helps to relax your muscles and restore them to their resting length, and improve flexibility (the range of movement about your joints).

As a guide, allow 10 minutes of post-exercise stretching for every one hour of exercise. Make these post-exercise stretches more thorough than your pre-exercise stretches. Ensure that you stretch all the major muscle groups that you have used during your exercise. Stretch each muscle group for 20 to 30 seconds, 2 to 3 times.

#### **Walking for Physical Fitness**

What makes a walk a workout? It's largely a matter of pace and distance. When you're walking for exercise, you don't saunter, stroll, or shuffle. Instead, you move out at a steady clip that is brisk enough to make your heart beat faster and cause you to breathe more deeply.

Here are some tips to help you develop an efficient walking style:

- ◆ Hold head erect and keep back straight and abdomen flat. Toes should point straight ahead and arms should swing loosely at sides.
- ◆ Land on the heel of the foot and roll forward to drive off the ball of the foot. Walking only on the ball of the foot, or in a flat-footed style, may cause fatigue and soreness.
- ◆ Take long, easy strides, but don't strain for distance. When walking up or down hills, or at a very rapid pace, lean forward slightly.
- ◆ Breathe deeply (with mouth open, if that is more comfortable).

#### **For Beginners. How Far? . . . How Fast? . . . How Soon?**

Beginning walkers can make their workouts less strenuous by limiting how fast and far they walk. Keep in mind the following:

1. Walk short distances. Begin with a five-minute stroll and gradually increase your distance.
2. Forget about speed. Walk at a comfortable pace. Focus on good posture, keeping your head lifted and shoulders relaxed.
3. Swing your arms naturally, and breathe deeply. If you can't catch your breath, slow down or avoid hills.
4. Be sure you can talk while walking. If you can't converse, you are walking too fast.

Now that you have decided to begin walking for exercise, you may be shocked at how poor your condition is. Don't be discouraged. You can systematically build your stamina and strength. Patience is the key to success. Some experts say that it takes a month of reconditioning to make up for each year of physical inactivity.

No one can tell you exactly how far or how fast to walk at the start, but you can determine the proper pace and distance by experimenting. We recommend that you begin by walking for 20 minutes at least four or five times a week at a pace that feels comfortable to you. If that proves to be too tiring, or too easy, reduce or lengthen your time accordingly.

Some very old people and some people who are ill begin by walking for one or two minutes, resting a minute, and repeating this cycle until they begin to be fatigued. Where you have to start isn't important; it's where you're going that counts.

As your condition improves, you should gradually increase your time and pace. After you have been walking for 20 minutes several days a week for one month, start walking 30 minutes per outing. Eventually, your goal should be to get to the place where you can comfortably walk three miles in 45 minutes, but there is no hurry about getting there.

The speed at which you walk is less important than the time you devote to it, although we recommend that you walk as briskly as your condition permits. It takes about 20 minutes for your body to begin realizing the "training effects" of sustained exercise.

The "talk test" can help you find the right pace. You should be able to carry on a conversation while walking. If you're too breathless to talk, you're going too fast.

The more often you walk, the faster you will improve. Three workouts a week are considered to be a "maintenance level" of exercise. More frequent workouts are required for swift improvement.