



Walking for Life

Benefits to walking regularly for exercise – walking can improve the body's ability to consume oxygen during exertion, lower the resting heart rate, reduce blood pressure, and increase the efficiency of the heart and lungs. It also helps burn excess calories. Plus there are the psychological rewards of feeling better, sleeping better and an improved mental outlook.

Since obesity and high blood pressure are among the leading risk factors for heart attack and stroke, walking offers protection against two of our major killers.

Before starting your walking program - 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. Also, if you have orthopedic issues, high blood pressure or other cardiovascular problems, you should consult your physician before beginning any kind of exercise program.

What makes walking a workout? When you're walking for exercise, you move at a steady clip that is brisk enough to make your heart beat faster and cause you to breathe more deeply.

Tips to help you develop an efficient walking style:

- ~ Hold head erect and keep back straight and abdomen engaged. Toes should point straight ahead and arms should swing loosely at sides at roughly a 90 degree angle.
- ~ 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.

How Far?...How Fast?...How Soon? - 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. I 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 people need to 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 conditioning 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 I recommend that you walk as briskly as your body permits.

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.

Bookends to your Walking Routine – make sure that you take a few minutes prior to beginning your program to warm up. This could simply be marching in place or walking at a slower pace for a few minutes. The goal is to get your body warmer and loosen up for your muscles.

Once you have completed your walk, finish up with stretching.

Listen to Your Body - 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 habit that can make you healthier and happier.

What to Wear When Walking - A good pair of shoes is a requirement. Any shoes that are comfortable, provide good support, and don't cause blisters or calluses will do. Visit one of many local shoe store professionals to be assessed and fitted for proper shoes. The investment will save you in the end.

Weather will dictate the rest of your attire. As a general rule, you will want to wear lighter clothing when temperatures are warmer. When cold, 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 cap or ski cap also will help trap body heat and provide protection for the head in very cold temperatures.

Completing your Workout Program - Walking is good exercise for the legs, heart, and lungs, but it is not a complete exercise program without stretching and strengthening for your entire body. Make sure to consult with a certified fitness professional on what strengthening and flexibility exercises are appropriate for you and your specific health history.

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