

Walking is the single most popular adult exercise in this country.

And why not? It's safe, easy, and cheap. Best of all, it makes us look and feel great. Studies show that a regular schedule of brisk walking has several benefits:

- Improves circulation and helps heart and lungs work more efficiently.
- Burns calories to help lose extra pounds or maintain ideal weight. An average 150-pound person walking at a speed of about 2 miles per hour will burn about 240 calories in an hour.
- Eases tension. You can walk to think—or walk to not think.
- Boosts energy.

What makes a walk a workout?

The short answer is pace and time or distance. When you are walking to exercise, you don't stroll or stop to window shop. After an initial warm-up, you move out at a steady pace that is brisk enough to make your heart beat faster and to cause you to breathe more deeply. Walking needs to be done for at least 30 minutes if your body is to achieve any "training effect."

Use the "talk test"

Benefits are highest when you walk as briskly as your condition permits. The "talk test" can help you find the right pace. If you are too breathless to talk, you're going too fast. If you develop dizziness, pain, nausea, or other unusual symptoms when walking, slow down or stop. If your problem persists, see your physician before walking again.

Fitness cannot be stored.

Walking speed is less important than walking time and frequency. Most authorities recommend exercising at least **five times weekly**.

Wondering what to wear?

Choose shoes that are comfortable and provide good support. Cushioned shoes with a slightly elevated heel and arch supports are preferable. Good running shoes are good walking shoes. Select loose, comfortable clothes for your walks. In cold weather, it's better to wear several layers of light clothing than one or two heavy layers. The extra layers help to trap heat, and they are easy to shed if you get too warm. At night, wear light-colored clothing or a reflecting band. To maintain the proper body heat, always wear a cap during cold weather.

Walk with style

These tips will help you feel (and look!) better during and after your walking jaunts:

- Keep your head erect and back straight. Let your arms swing loosely at your sides.
- Stay relaxed, breathe deeply, and take comfortable steps.
- Always land on your heel and roll forward, finally pushing off the ball of your foot. Walking flat-footed or on the balls of your feet may cause fatigue or soreness.
- Toes should point straight ahead. "Toeing-in" and "toeing-out" are inefficient ways of walking and may aggravate or contribute to leg/hip joint problems.
- Always warm up (and cool down) with 5 minutes of slow walking. Stretch slowly afterwards to improve flexibility and reduce the likelihood of muscle soreness.
- Monitor your speed with the "talk test."
- Walk safe. Watch for dogs, cars, and bicycles. Face oncoming traffic. Do not assume drivers see you.
- Compete only with yourself. Individuals of similar ages and build vary widely in their capacity for exercise. Focus on steadily improving your own performance, not walking farther or faster than someone else.

Guidelines for a sample walking program

No one can tell you exactly how far or how fast to walk at the start, but the following guidelines can help you develop a plan for making walking a regular habit. If you've been inactive for a long time, give yourself time to get into shape. Build up slowly using these guidelines as goals—otherwise you might be tempted to push yourself too far too quickly so that walking for exercise stops being enjoyable.

	WARM UP <i>(walk slowly)</i>	TARGET-ZONE EXERCISING <i>(walk briskly)</i>	COOL DOWN <i>(walk slowly)</i>	TOTAL TIME
Week 1				
Session A	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	15 minutes
Session B	Repeat above pattern			
Session C	Repeat above pattern			
Continue with a MINIMUM of three exercise sessions per week				
Week 2	5 minutes	Walk briskly 7 minutes	5 minutes	17 minutes
Week 3	5 minutes	Walk briskly 9 minutes	5 minutes	19 minutes
Week 4	5 minutes	Walk briskly 11 minutes	5 minutes	21 minutes
Week 5	5 minutes	Walk briskly 13 minutes	5 minutes	23 minutes
Week 6	5 minutes	Walk briskly 15 minutes	5 minutes	25 minutes
Week 7	5 minutes	Walk briskly 18 minutes	5 minutes	28 minutes
Week 8	5 minutes	Walk briskly 20 minutes	5 minutes	30 minutes
Week 9	5 minutes	Walk briskly 23 minutes	5 minutes	33 minutes
Week 10	5 minutes	Walk briskly 26 minutes	5 minutes	36 minutes
Week 11	5 minutes	Walk briskly 28 minutes	5 minutes	38 minutes
Week 12	5 minutes	Walk briskly 30 minutes	5 minutes	40 minutes

Source: "Exercise and Your Heart" National Institutes of Health (1981)



Remember,
if you are looking for a path
to fitness, you can walk there!

For more information, visit these Web sites:

Iowa State University Extension to Families, Nutrition—<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/healthnutrition/>

Iowa State University Extension Publications—<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/>

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