

# Where to Begin?

*Tips for making the most of your walking regime.*

## Getting Started

First, if you have any health concerns or medical conditions, be sure to check with your doctor for advice before you begin a routine.

If you're new to walking, start off with slow, short sessions. This may involve simply walking a few blocks a couple times a day. Gradually, once you've built up your stamina, you can increase your speed, time, *and* steps! Eventually, start developing a habit of walking more. Walking daily will help (a minimum of 5 days a week is a good goal). You should walk fast enough to raise your heart rate, but not so you're gasping for air.

Maintain good posture while walking and think of elongating your body. Hold your head up, eyes forward, shoulders down and relaxed. Tighten your abdominal muscles and buttocks and fall into a natural stride.

Keep well hydrated before, during, and after walking. Make sure to warm up, cool down, and stretch to avoid injury.

After you've formed the habit you will want to evaluate your program and your goals.

## Examples of Goals

- *Goal for General Health Benefits:* Try to walk 30 minutes a day, most days of the week, at a "talking" pace. (you have elevated breathing, but you can still carry a conversation.)
- *Goal for Cardiovascular Fitness:* Try to walk 3 to 4 days a week, 20 to 30 minutes at a very fast pace. At this pace you are breathing hard but not gasping for air.
- *Goal for Weight Loss:* Try to walk a minimum of five days a week, 45 to 60 minutes at a brisk pace.

A reasonable goal for most people is to increase average daily steps each week by 500 per day until you can easily average 10,000 per day. For example, if you currently average 3000 steps each day, your goal for week one is 3500 each day. Your week 2 goal is 4000 each day. Continue to increase each week and you should be averaging 10,000 steps.

## Tips for Increasing Your Steps

- Take a walk with your spouse, child, or friend
- Walk the dog
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator
- Park farther from the store
- Better yet, walk to the store
- Get up to change the channel
- Window shop
- Plan a walking meeting
- Walk over to visit a neighbor
- Get outside to walk around the garden or do a little weeding

There are many ways to increase your steps. Use your imagination and come up with your own list!

## Monitor the “Steps” You’re making Toward a Health or Fitness Goal

Another great way to track your progress is to create a “Wellness Journal.” Some notes you can keep in your journal include:

- steps and/or mileage
- notes on how you’re feeling
- how your body is improving
- other changes you are making to improve your health
- motivational quotes

## Practicing your Walking Technique

How you hold your body is very important to walking comfortably and easily. Good posture will enable you to breathe easier and avoid back pain.

- Stand up straight, not leaning forward or back, which may put strain on the back muscles.
- Keep your eyes forward and chin up, looking down 20 feet ahead of you
- Let your shoulders fall and relax and keep them slightly back.
- Tighten your stomach and tuck in your behind

Arm motion can lend power to your walking and acting as a balance to your leg motion.

- Bend your elbow 90 degrees and keep them close to your body.
- Keep your hands loose in a partially closed curl, never clenched.
- With each step, the arm opposite your forward foot should come straight forward.

Try walking in a rolling motion (make sure you have flexible shoes).

- Strike the ground first with your heel and roll through the step from heel to toe.
- Use your leg muscles and push off with your toe.
- Your shin muscles may tire at first until they are strengthened.

## Warming up and Cooling down

- Always warm up with a slow, easy pace for 5 minutes and stretch your legs muscles.
- Stretching will add flexibility and can make your walking more comfortable
- For the final 5-10 minutes of your walk, cool down with an easy walking pace.
- At the end of your walk you may want to repeat the stretches you did after your warm-up.

## Start Walking!

- Set your goals and keep them realistic.
- Walk alone or in groups, to music or in silence.
- Make sure to dress appropriately and don’t use weather as an excuse not to walk!
- Start off at a comfortable pace for you.
- Track your steps or miles taken on your weekly log sheets.
- Use the notes section in the back to record feelings, thoughts, and motivational cues you may discover along the way.