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Walking Your Way to Fitness

Michigan State University

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Fitness 7

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W

alking your
way to fitness

America is walking.

According to national fitness studies, walking is now the single most popular adult exercise in this country. You might be tempted to say, "Walking is not really exercise, it's...well, it's just walking," but more and more persons are discovering that walking is an idea whose time has come. And why not? It's safe. It's easy. It makes us look and feel great. And, it doesn't cost anything.

Why Walk?

What happens to your body as you walk? Studies show that, when done briskly on a regular schedule, walking:

- Improves circulation and helps your heart and lungs work more efficiently.
- Burns off calories to help you lose extra pounds or helps you stay at your ideal weight. An average 150-pound person walking at a speed of about 2 miles per hour will use up around 240 calories in an hour.
- Eases tension. You can walk to think—or walk to not think. Walking irons away anger and tension.
- Gives you more energy.

Walking for Physical Fitness

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



Here are some tips to help you to develop a good walking style:

- Keep your head erect and back straight and 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.
- Your 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.

HOW FAR FAST OFTEN?

Questions about how far, how fast and how often you should walk can be answered by listening to your body. No one can tell you exactly how far or how fast to walk at the start, but you

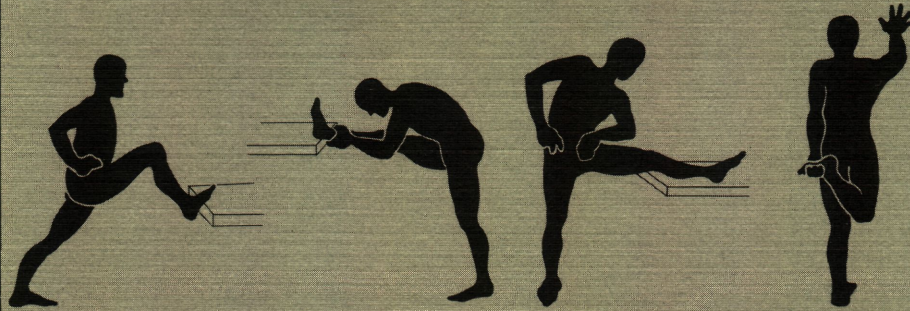
can determine the proper pace and distance by experimenting. If you've been inactive for a long time, it will take time to get into shape. Build up slowly. Try to set goals—otherwise you will be tempted to push yourself too far too quickly and exercise will cease to be enjoyable.

HOW FAR? You may want to start by walking for just a few minutes and then gradually increasing the time. (Note the sample walking program on last page.) Walking needs to be done for at least 30 minutes if your body is to achieve any "training effect."

HOW FAST? The speed at which you walk is less important than the time you devote to it, although it is recommended that you walk as briskly as your condition permits. The "talk test" can help you find the right pace. You should be able to carry on a conversation while walking. If you are too breathless to talk, you're going too fast. When walking, should you develop dizziness, pain, nausea or other unusual symptoms, slow down or stop. If your problem persists, see your physician before walking again.

HOW OFTEN? Regularity is the key. To be effective, most authorities agree that you should exercise at least three times a week, preferably on alternate days. Fitness cannot be stored.

Warming Up for Your Walk:



Bending and stretching exercises before a workout loosen up tight muscles and joints and prepare the heart and lungs for more strenuous exercise. The same stretching exercises after a workout help the body cool down gradually and reduce the likelihood of muscle soreness the next day.

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

for walking. Choose a shoe that is comfortable and provides 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. To maintain the proper body heat, always wear a cap during cold weather.

Warm Up and Cool Down

Begin each exercise session with 5 to 10 minutes of bending, twisting and stretching the head, arms, shoulders, legs and ankles. These exercises will give your body a chance to limber up, get your circulation going and loosen up muscles and joints. All stretching should be done slowly without bouncy, jerky motions.

After exercising, slow down gradually by walking slowly. If you have been walking briskly or jogging, repeat your stretching and limbering exercises to loosen up your muscles.

Some FOOTnotes

A good pair of shoes is the only special equipment required

Guidelines

Here are a few hints to help you develop a walking program:

1. Warm up before you begin, paying special attention to stretching the backs of the legs and thighs. Also be sure to cool down slowly.
2. Don't push yourself. If you get tired, slow down. Try the "talk test." If you are too breathless to carry on a conversation, you're going too fast!
3. Walk regularly. If you don't exercise at least three times a week, you won't experience as many of the benefits of regular physical activity as you could, or make as much progress.
4. Watch out for dogs and cars. Wear light-colored clothes or a reflecting band during darkness so that drivers can see you. Face oncoming traffic and do not assume that drivers will notice you on the roadway.

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

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Sample Walking Program

The following suggested guidelines for a walking program were developed by the National Institute of Health and published in the publication *Exercise and Your Heart*. If you are just beginning a walking program, it might be a good pattern to follow.

	Warm up	Target zone exercising	Cool down	Total time
Week 1				
Session A	Walk slowly 5 min.	Then walk briskly 5 min.	Then walk slowly 5 min.	15 min.
Session B	Repeat above pattern.			
Session C	Repeat above pattern.			
Continue with at least three exercise sessions during each week of the program				
Week 2	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 7 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	17 min.
Week 3	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 9 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	19 min.
Week 4	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 11 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	21 min.
Week 5	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 13 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	23 min.
Week 6	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 15 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	25 min.
Week 7	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 18 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	28 min.
Week 8	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 20 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	30 min.
Week 9	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 23 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	33 min.
Week 10	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 26 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	36 min.
Week 11	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 28 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	38 min.
Week 12	Walk slowly 5 min.	Walk briskly 30 min.	Walk slowly 5 min.	40 min.

Resources:

1. **Plan Your Way to Fitness:** Gaynelle Hogan, Virginia Cooperative Extension Specialist, Consumer Health Education, Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 854, 1979.
2. **On the Run, What to Wear,** Dr. Beatrice Kalka, Virginia Cooperative Extension Specialist, Clothing and Textiles, Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 831, 1979.
3. **Walking for Exercise and Pleasure,** President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Washington, D.C. 20201 (single copy free).
4. **Exercise and Your Heart,** NIH Publication, No. 81-1677. 43 pages, May 1981. For free copy, write Consumer Information Center, Department EE, Pueblo, CO 81009.
5. **Walking,** from *Current Health 2*, October 1981. © 1981 by Current Innovations, Inc. Reprinted by permission. Further reproduction prohibited.

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