



## Walking 101

Walking is low-risk and easy to start. It can help keep you fit and reduce your risk of serious diseases, like heart disease, stroke, diabetes and more.

### A regular walking program can also:

- ✓ Improve your cholesterol profile
- ✓ Lower blood pressure
- ✓ Increase your energy and stamina
- ✓ Boost “couch potato” bone strength
- ✓ Prevent weight gain

American Heart Association recommends that adults get 150 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week. **Even short 10 minute activity sessions can be added up over the week to reach this goal.** If you would benefit from lowering your blood pressure or cholesterol, aim for 40 minute sessions of moderate to vigorous activity 3 to 4 times a week. You could do this by walking 2 miles briskly (about 4 miles/hr). If that's too fast, choose a more comfortable pace.

### Get ready

All you need to get started are comfortable clothes and supportive shoes. Layer loose clothing, keeping in mind that brisk exercise elevates the body's temperature. Shoes designed for walking or running are best. Make sure you have a little wiggle room between your longest toe (1/2") and the end of the shoe. Avoid cotton socks since they retain moisture and can promote blisters.

### Work on your technique

Begin with short distances. Start with a stroll that feels comfortable (perhaps 5-10 minutes) and gradually increase your time or distance each week by 10-20 percent by adding a few minutes or blocks. If it's easier on your joints and your schedule to take a couple of 10- to 20-minute walks instead of one long walk, do it!

- **Focus on posture.** Keep your head lifted, tummy pulled in and shoulders relaxed. Swing your arms naturally. Avoid carrying hand weights since they put extra stress on your elbows and shoulders. Don't overstride. Select a comfortable, natural step length. If you want to move faster, pull your back leg through more quickly.
- **Breathe deeply.** If you can't talk or catch your breath while walking, slow down. At first, forget about walking speed. Just get out there and walk!

## Pick up the pace

To warm up, walk at an easy tempo for the first several minutes. Then gradually adopt a more purposeful pace. A good way to add variety is to incorporate some brisk intervals. For example, walk one block fast, two blocks slow and repeat several times. Gradually add more fast intervals with shorter recovery periods. Concentrate on increasing your speed while maintaining good posture.

Walking hills is a great way to tone your legs. Using Nordic walking poles can help you burn more calories and give you better posture and overall muscle endurance. Treadmill walking, while not as scenic, can be convenient during bad weather.

The end of your walk is an ideal time to stretch since your body is warmed up. Stretch your hamstrings and calves as well as your chest, shoulders and back. Hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

Track your progress. Although experts recommend walking at least 30 minutes a day, there are no hard and fast rules. Walking 60 minutes/day and brisk intervals will help you burn more calories. Fit walking into your schedule whenever you can. That may mean three 10-minute walks over the course of a day. The best schedule is one that keeps you walking and keeps you fit!

## Be safe

- **Avoid traffic accidents.** Listening to lively music while you walk is a great way to energize your workout. But if you wear headphones, keep the volume down and watch out for traffic that you may not hear. Wear light colors or reflective clothing and carry a flashlight or glow stick if you walk when visibility is low.
- **Walking on sidewalks is best,** but if you have to walk on the street, stick to streets with lower speed limits. Faster streets are riskier because motorists are less likely to see pedestrians and cannot stop as quickly. Accidents involving pedestrians have an 85 percent chance of becoming fatal if the car is moving at 40 mph as compared to only 5 percent if the speed is 20 mph.
- **Know your area.** Pay attention to what businesses are open in the area you'll be walking and know the location of emergency telephones. Walk on well-traveled streets rather than taking shortcuts in less crowded areas such as alleys or parking lots. If you give the message that you are calm, self-assured and have a purposeful gait, you'll lower your chances of becoming a victim.
- **Two heads are better than one.** Walking with a partner or in groups discourages crime and may help alert you to dangers such as speeding motorists or unleashed dogs.

If you experience foot, knee, hip or back pain when walking, STOP and check with your doctor to find out the cause. You may need special exercises or better shoes. If you have osteoarthritis and experience increased joint pain lasting an hour or two after walking, consider an alternate activity like stationary cycling or water exercise. But don't stop exercising!

**For more information visit the American Heart Association website, [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)**