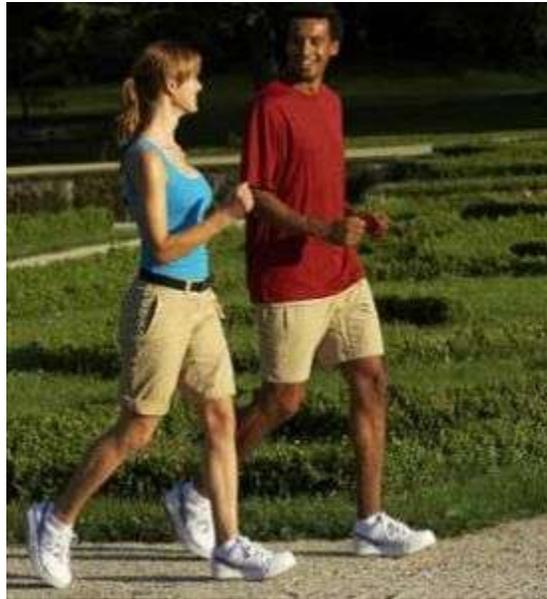




Walking for Beginners



Why Walk?

Walking is one of the most popular forms of exercise for beginners. It is safe, easy, enjoyable, and it works for weight loss. It doesn't require any special skills, expensive equipment, or trips to the gym. It really is as simple as putting on a good pair of shoes and heading out your front door.

Walking is a low-impact aerobic activity, meaning that one foot is always in contact with the ground. Walking does not jar your bones the way high-impact exercises do, such as complicated aerobics classes. Walking builds the muscles in your legs and improves endurance; it also helps with coordination and balance -- two things we tend to lose when we gain weight.

Go Shoe Shopping

You should not wear the same shoes for exercise walking as you do for everyday activities such as shopping. It is important to have a good pair of walking shoes before you begin a walking regime. Inadequate shoes will result in pain or blisters, or a combination of both, that

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can virtually halt your walking routine before it has even started.



Good walking shoes will properly support your spine, hips and knees as well as your feet. When you go shopping for walking shoes, you should do just that -- buy walking shoes. Aerobic or basketball shoes are not designed like walking shoes. Walking shoes both provide the needed support and are more flexible than other styles.

Investing in a good pair of walking shoes will pay off in lots of ways: You will be more likely to stick to your walking routine if you are free of pain. Walking will seem easier and you will be able to increase the duration of your walks when your feet are properly supported. Lastly, the right shoes will help decrease your risk of injury.

Stand Up Straight

Beginning walkers often make the mistake of having poor posture; it's easy to lean forward slightly when you first begin. Instead, you should always keep your hips directly straight under your upper body. You should not be stiff, however. Just be careful not to bend at your hips or to hunch over. Keep your head up -- look ahead of you rather than at the ground or your feet.

Get into the Swing

You should keep your arms relaxed as you walk. If you swing your arms, you should not swing them out; they should be at a 90-degree angle at your sides. You should be countering your legs, which means when you move your left leg, you'll move your right arm, and vice versa. Keep your hands at the mid-section of your body and don't clench your fists too tight.

Some people find it easier to walk without moving their arms at first. But if you do swing

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them, you will help elevate your heart rate even more than moving your legs alone.

Get Started Today

When you are just beginning, try to walk for 10 minutes up and down your own driveway. When deciding whether to walk or not the next day, gauge how you feel. If you don't feel overly-taxed, go ahead and make that 10-minute driveway trip again.

Gradually increase the duration of your walk by five minutes whenever you feel you can. Soon you will be walking for a healthy chunk of time. How long it takes you to work up to a more substantial amount of time is completely unique to you. Don't worry about other people's standards. Even if it takes days, weeks, or even a month to work up to a longer walk, that is fine.

Whether to walk daily or every other day is also up to you. If you find that you have pain or soreness, you may want to rest every other day, or replace your walk with another activity. Soreness or aches will happen, especially when you are just getting started. If you have continuous pain, however, see your doctor to ensure that no health problems are affecting your ability to walk for extended periods of time.

Take a Load Off

While like Heavy Hands (special hand weights for walking) are popular among more experienced walkers, they should be avoided if you are just starting out. Hand weights help elevate your heart rate and build muscle, but they can also cause pain and injury to the arms and wrists. As you are still in the beginning stages of your walking routine, increase your walks' intensity by walking longer or a little faster rather than adding additional weight to your body.

Count on a Pedometer

Consider buying a pedometer for everyday use. Pedometers are inexpensive and act as an ideal motivational tool. Try to walk at least 10,000 steps a day, which is an excellent goal for weight management and good health.

Before You Begin

If you are a man over 40, a woman over 50, or if you have been inactive for an extended

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period of time, the U.S. Surgeon General recommends consulting with your physician before embarking on this or any exercise regimen.

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