

Just Walk It

Further Information on Walking and Physical Activity

Health benefits of regular walking can include:

- A lowered risk of heart attack and stroke
- Weight loss and weight maintenance
- Prevention and maintenance of diabetes
- Lowered risk of overall mortality
- Decreased risk of heart disease
- Improved fitness
- Reduction in and control of blood cholesterol and blood pressure
- Reduced risk of developing some forms of cancer
- Reduced risk of osteoporosis due to maintenance of bone density
- Achieving and maintaining a greater quality of life

(Sources: Heart Foundation, Health Enhancement Systems)

While there are many benefits to walking and it is an activity that can be done by everyone, it may still be necessary to have a check-up with a doctor before starting a walking program. For people who have diabetes, hypertension, an unstable medical condition such as asthma or an orthopaedic injury, it is highly recommended that they get the all clear from their doctor before starting an exercise program. Adults over 35 years who have medical conditions and/or cardiac risk factors, have not participated in regular physical activity for quite some time or wish to undertake a more intense training program should also get medical clearance (American College of Sports Medicine, <http://www.acsm.org/>).

Before starting to do any form of exercise, it is important to warm up the body, especially the cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems, to prepare for the stress of exercise and to prevent injuries. Although walking is not usually stressful for the body, it is still important to warm-up correctly beforehand. Ideally, your warm-up prior to walking should include a gentle walk and stretching. The gentle walk will increase heart rate and get blood pumping to the exercising muscles, whilst stretching will warm up the muscles. A warm-up walk is mainly for people who will be power-walking and/or working at a higher intensity than normal. A warm-up should take between 5-10 minutes depending on age, fitness level, type of and intensity of the activity/exercise about to be performed.

A cool-down should also be performed after completing an exercise session. The cool-down should follow a very similar format to the warm-up and as such will promote venous return to the heart, thus preventing blood pooling in the extremities (American Council on Exercise, <http://www.acefitness.org>)

For stretching ideas visit: <http://www.fitnesstransform.com/stretches.php>,
<http://www.britannia.ac.uk/images/stretches.jpg> ,
<http://www.massageme.com.au/pics/str-stretches.gif>,
<http://www.netfit.co.uk/stretching.htm>

Depending on what one is trying to achieve from walking, for example, to lose weight or improve fitness, one may need to change the intensity of work and the frequency of workout sessions. In order to lose weight, The American College of

Sports Medicine recommends that a person works at and maintains an intensity of 60-90% of age-predicted maximum heart rate for a minimum of 30 minutes per day, at least 5 days per week (American College of Sports Medicine, <http://www.acsm.org/index.asp>).

To help calculate target heart rate zones see Health Status on the following link <http://www.healthstatus.com/cgi-bin/calc/calculator.cgi>.

Walking at approximately 4.5 miles per hour or just under 3 kilometres per hour is recommended for fitness improvement. This is equivalent to approximately 150 steps per minute. However this figure will vary depending on an individuals' step length. As a general health guideline, a person should aim to walk 3-4 times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes at a pace that makes them feel puffed, yet still allows them to maintain a conversation. These planned sessions should be done in addition to incidental walking, such as walking to and from work (eMedicine Consumer Health, <http://www.emedicinehealth.com/articles/25907-3.asp>; NetFit, <http://www.netfit.co.uk/walking-web.htm>)

Many health promotion walking programs advise completing 10,000 steps daily (10000 Steps – The Walking Site <http://www.thewalkingsite.com/10000steps.html> and Creative Walking <http://www.creativewalking.com>)