

The Health Benefits of Walking: Part One

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We thank retired Cambria personal trainer and fitness expert Colleen Juarez for stressing these points.

Why Walk?

Walking can help you lose body fat and improve your joint health, circulation, bone density, sleep cycle, blood pressure and mood.

Set Goals

Make sure your walking goal is realistic when you begin. If 20 minutes every day leaves you exhausted and sore, try 10 minutes on alternate days. Increase your time by five minutes each week as you build up your fitness level. Once you hit your goal for minutes each walking session, then add more days. After that, if you want a more challenging workout, increase your speed or find a route with more hills.

Schedule It

Are you an early riser who wakes up ready to move? Plan your walk first thing in the morning or early evening. Write down the time on your calendar and let others know you're busy. Better yet, make a regular appointment with a friend so it's harder to skip. If you plan to walk to run errands, bring a backpack to hold anything you need to carry keeping your hands free.

Getting Started

It doesn't take much to improve your health with walking. About 150 minutes a week should do it. That's about 30 minutes a day, five days a week. If you need to start with less than that, don't worry about it. Even five minutes a day is better than none. If you want to do more than 30 minutes, great! Just work up to it slowly and talk to your doctor if you have an illness or don't know if you're healthy enough for exercise.

To Start Your Walking Plan

Try walking briskly at a 2.5 to 3 mph pace (walking a mile in 20-24 minutes beginning with 10 minutes per day for the first two to three weeks). Some may be able to walk a little faster in the beginning 3-3.5 mph (walking a mile in 17-20 min). Slowly increase the time you walk by 10 minutes per week until you are able to walk 30 minutes per day, six days per week. Continue increasing the walking times by 10-15 minutes three days a week. The other two days, try to get in a few more hills. Keep adding time and hills to your walks if you want more vigorous workouts.

Keep Track

There are all kinds of gadgets and apps that can tell you how far you go each day in steps or miles. Some might even tell you how many calories you've burned. An app on your phone might be the easiest to use, but there are other small digital devices that do the same thing. There is a device known as a pedometer that counts steps which you may be interested in getting. Map My Fitness is an easy, free app I frequently use.

Part Two will cover shoes, clothing, hydration, walking poles and integrating walking into daily activities.

The Health Benefits of Walking: Part Two

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In Part One of this series, we covered the benefits of walking, setting walking goals, scheduling walks, getting started and keeping track of your progress. In this part we will address proper shoes, clothing, hydration, walking poles and finally integrating walking into your daily routine. We thank retired Cambria personal trainer and fitness expert, Colleen Juarez for stressing these points.

The Right Shoes for You

What makes a good walking shoe? Decent padding, material that "breathes," water resistance, and flexibility from heel to toe are part of it. But the most important thing is fit. Your shoes should be loose enough so that you can wiggle your toes with ease, but snug enough to keep your foot from sliding around. If they rub and form calluses or corns, they're too tight. A wide toe base is recommended as your feet tend to swell if you're on them for long periods of time.

Clothing

Your clothes should be loose, comfortable, and breathable. If it's cold, you might try layering so you can remove some of them as you get warmer. You'll need rain gear if the weather looks iffy, as well as a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen to protect you from the sun. Remember, even if it's cloudy you still can burn! Always bring your charged cell phone, it is a useful way to track distance and in case you need it for an emergency or if you need a map.

Hydration

You sweat more when you exercise. When water levels get too low (dehydration) you might feel tired, nauseated, dizzy, or confused. You might not notice the sweat you lose especially if the air is cooler. Start your morning with two 8oz glasses of water. This way you'll be starting your walk already well hydrated. On warmer days and longer walks, carry electrolyte replacements for sodium and potassium which may be lost through sweat and over time. Any electrolyte replacement liquids such as a few ounces of beverages like Gatorade or Pedialyte will help restore lost electrolytes.

Walking Poles

Using walking poles can assist with ease of walking - essentially giving you another set of legs. By holding the poles next to you with your elbows bent at a 90-degree angle, forearms parallel to the ground you can comfortably walk a further distance with ease especially if you have balance issues, weak knee or neuropathy in your feet. They offer a meaningful amount of weight that is taken off your feet, ankles, and knees as you walk. Walking uphill, the poles drive you up that hill. When you walk downhill, the poles can be used to push back to slow your descent.

Make Walking a Part of Other Daily Activities

Think about the places you often go, like the coffee shop, post office, or the hardware store. Then think to yourself: could I walk? If it's not too far, maybe you could walk to the bus stop or park at the far end of the grocery store parking lot. Another idea: plan a "walking meeting" instead of a sitting one. By paying attention, you will find there are lots of places to work some extra steps into your day. Happy Walking!!