

Starting a Walking Program

Brisk walking gives you more bang for your buck than just about any other exercise. There's no expensive gear. You can do it from almost anywhere, and you can do it in chunks of as little as 10 minutes at a time. The best part is that with just 30 minutes a day, you can walk your way to better health.

Why start a walking program?

Regular, brisk walking will help you:

- **Prevent or manage serious health conditions**, like high blood pressure, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.
- **Improve vital body functions**, including memory, balance, coordination, circulation, and bone strength.
- **Maintain a healthy weight** — or lose weight.
- **Feel better.** Walking reduces stress and depression, increases energy, improves sleep, and improves mood.

These benefits won't come all at once, though. This is about building a **lifelong habit** that will pay off in the long run.

How fast and how far do I need to go?

If you're not exercising at all, then start with walking 10 minutes a day. After a week or two, try increasing to 20 minutes a day. Keep building up a little every week. Aim for the targets below for the greatest benefits.

- **How long:** If you're walking for general health, build up to **150 minutes per week** — or about **30 minutes on most days**. If you're trying to lose weight, aim for 250 to 300 minutes per week — or 60 minutes on most days. If you can't get it all in at once, break it up into as little as 10 minutes at a time.
- **How fast:** Walk at a somewhat vigorous pace — so you breathe a little harder than normal. If you can still talk in complete sentences, you're about right. If you can sing a song, try picking up the pace a little. The benefits come from a brisk walk, not a stroll.

To build up, increase just one thing at a time: go one more day per week, add few more minutes per day, or walk a little faster. Do what works for you.



"I'd always thought of myself as a healthy person, but I didn't exercise, and I didn't have a lot of energy. I started walking just 10 minutes at lunchtime. It felt good, so I kept building up — and up. Now I'm feeling healthy!"

What about safety?

There's very little risk of injury from walking, but you still need to consider a few things.

- Drink water before your walk, especially if it's hot out. During the summer, try to walk during the cooler parts of the day.
- Get an okay from your doctor if you've had heart trouble, chest pain, high blood pressure, dizziness, or if you're over 65 and haven't been getting regular exercise.
- Walk with a friend when you can, and carry a cell phone, just in case you have an unexpected problem.

What's stopping you?

If you're having trouble getting started, think about the reasons. Do you feel like you don't have the time? Or a good place to go? Or a friend to join you? Or someone to watch your children? Do you have a health concern? Whatever it is, write it down. Then start making a plan to overcome it. Ask for help or support where you need it.

Make a plan to build a habit

Walking may not be all that hard, but building a new habit can be. It's easier if you make a plan, set goals, and reward yourself for reaching small milestones. Use the space below to plan out what you'll do and how you'll keep track of your progress. Then post this plan where you'll see it often.

1. Focus on how walking will help you

What are your own best reasons to start a walking program?

- Health reasons: _____
- Social or emotional reasons: _____
- Other: _____

2. Enlist support

Starting a new lifestyle habit requires support from the people around you. Need someone to go with? To watch your children? To remind you? What support do you need, and who can help you?

3. Make a regular schedule

One of the hardest parts of building a new habit is making the time for it. Think about your week, and plan for times you could regularly walk.

Day	Time	Place
Mon Thurs	during kids' soccer practice	around the field
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

4. Set goals, milestones, and rewards

- **What's your first goal?** Walk _____ minutes on _____ days for a total of _____ minutes over the week.
Other: _____
- **What's your goal this week?** Write this in pencil so you can update it weekly. _____

- **What will your milestones be?** Examples:
Every time I meet my goal for two weeks in a row, or, the first time I walk 6000 steps in a day.

- **How will you reward yourself when you meet each milestone?** For example, *I'll call an old friend to chat.*

5. Keep track of your progress

Keeping track of your progress will help motivate you to keep going — and remember when it's time for a reward. For example:

- Record your activity in a journal or a smartphone app.
- Get a pedometer that counts the number of steps you take every day.

How will you track your progress?

6. Set a goal with a date

Give yourself something to build toward. For example: *This May I want to do the breast cancer charity walk with my daughter.*

- In _____ I want to _____

7. When you slip up, get back on track

Everyone slips up now and then. If you get out of walking habit for a while, be kind to yourself about it and start again.

- What might get in the way of you keeping it up?

- What will you do to get back on track?
