



ACSM Information On...

## Starting a Walking Program

Walking is one of the simplest and least expensive options to increase your physical activity level and improve your overall health. It is a weight-bearing exercise that helps maintain bone density and is easy on joints. Walking at a brisk pace is considered moderate-intensity physical activity, and doing this most days of the week for 30 minutes or more enables you to meet the criteria for physical activity for health benefits recommended by ACSM and the American Heart Association.

### A COMPLETE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2011, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross country skiing
- Swimming.

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

### BENEFITS OF WALKING

- Becoming active significantly reduces your risk for cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and obesity.
- Walking works several major muscle groups – the knee extensors (quadriceps), hip extensors (hamstrings and gluteal muscles) and muscles of the lower legs (gastrocnemius and soleus in the back, anterior tibialis on the front, and arch muscles in the feet). These muscles help pump blood back to the heart, and exercising them improves circulation, muscular endurance and dynamic balance.

### WHAT DO I NEED TO START A WALKING PROGRAM?

- Start with a pair of well-fitted walking shoes with a flexible sole that provides good arch support and adequate cushion for your heel.
- Make sure you have loose-fitting, comfortable clothing appropriate for weather conditions.
- Make sure you have sunscreen and sunglasses to protect you from the sun.

The following questions should be considered when preparing to start a walking program:

- 1. Is this a good time for me to start exercising?** You might have to resolve some commonly regarded obstacles to starting your program, such as lack of time, feeling too tired, having caregiving responsibilities or not having a good place to walk. To cope with these obstacles, identify a specific time and schedule a walk, develop social support (walk with a significant other/spouse, family member, or friend), get assistance to free up some time to walk and locate a safe place in which to walk (outdoors and/or indoors). A moderate-intensity walk will help reduce fatigue and leave you feeling refreshed.
- 2. Am I prepared to start a walking program?** Do I have good footwear and comfortable clothing in which I can walk? Begin with a well-fitted pair of walking shoes. If you walk at dawn, dusk or night, wear light-colored reflective clothing to be more easily seen. Additional items to use when walking are a watch (especially convenient if it has a stop-watch or timing function) and a good pedometer.
- 3. Where can I walk safely?** Does my neighborhood have sidewalks and well-lit areas in which to walk? If not, are there facilities nearby in which I can

walk (parks, recreational facilities, malls, etc.)? Many shopping malls have special hours when they are open for walkers prior to shopping hours. Walking around a mall perimeter is also an option. Parks and schools may offer walking trails or outdoor tracks for walking. In addition, airports are great places in which to walk while waiting for planes to arrive or depart.

The following questions should be considered when developing a walking program:

- 1. How much time do I have available to spend walking each day?** For health benefits, walking can be done in one bout each day or accumulated in shorter bouts. Walking could be done early in the day, during work breaks or lunchtime, or after work or dinner.
- 2. How far or long should I walk?** If you are walking at a brisk pace (approximately 3-4 mph for most people), you will cover one or two miles in 30 minutes. ACSM recommends people participate in a walk or other moderate intensity exercise for 150 minutes or more a week for health benefits. For weight loss, 250 minutes or more of moderate-intensity activity is recommended per week. Start slowly and build up to maintain your motivation and avoid overuse injuries. Warm up with a slower pace for at least five minutes, increase your pace for 10- 30 minutes, then cool down by walking at a slower pace again for at least five minutes. If you are not active now, start with short distances and/or short time periods of 10-15 minutes at a time. Slowly increase your time and distance, up to 20 percent every two weeks, until you reach your goal.
- 3. How do I make and keep walking fun?** Try walking different routes in your neighborhood or mixing in a hill or two with flatter terrain. Vary your pace. Walk at a more casual or moderate pace for a couple of blocks, then increase your pace (power walk or speed walk) for a block. Walking with a friend is a good way to combine social time with exercise. Some people enjoy walking with music. Some music is geared more for exercise with energizing tunes and a beat or tempo suitable for walking. Be sure to remain aware of traffic and your surroundings. Keep track of your time and distance walked each day. Keeping a daily log tracks your progress and keeps you motivated.

## WALKING TECHNIQUE TO INCREASE ENERGY EXPENDITURE

Maintain good posture. Keep your spinal column erect, chin slightly up, shoulders relaxed and back a little, and use a confident but comfortable stride length. Contact the heels lightly first with your feet pointed straight ahead. As your leg strength and endurance improve, begin using a slightly longer stride, push off the toes, and use a more vigorous arm swing to utilize the upper body muscles to help burn more calories. Use your breathing as an intensity indicator – easy breathing (casual pace), halting speech (brisk 3-4 mph pace) and can't speak (too fast).

## USING A Pedometer

A pedometer is a motion-sensing device worn at the hip to count steps. Pedometers vary in sophistication, and some can be programmed with your average step length to more accurately estimate distance walked, calories expended and total activity time. It is a useful self-monitoring tool to help you keep track of your total steps and distance walked. You can use the following step index to classify your activity level based on steps per day. Keep in mind that if you regularly participate in non-ambulatory activity, your steps per day value will not accurately represent your activity level.

### NUMBER OF STEPS

**0-5,000**  
**5,000-7,499**  
**7,500-9,999**  
**10,000-12,500**  
**12,500 or more**

### ACTIVITY LEVEL

**Sedentary**  
**Low Active**  
**Somewhat Active**  
**Active**  
**Highly Active**

\*Developed by C Tudor-Locke and DR Bassett Jr. (2004)

A daily goal for most healthy adults is 10,000 steps per day, or approximately five miles. If your baseline is under this level, try to increase your steps by 1,000 per day every two weeks until you reach your 10,000 steps per day. To increase your activity level and daily step counts, look for opportunities to be more active. Park further away from your destination, if it is safe to do so, and take the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator. Even small amounts of additional activity increase total calorie expenditure and can make a difference in your fitness level and overall health over time.

Becoming and staying regularly active is one of the keys to good health and weight maintenance, and walking is an easy way to become and stay active for life.

## STAYING ACTIVE PAYS OFF!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity – such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking – significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more – regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

## THE FIRST STEP

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine if you're ready to begin an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance from dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have recently been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin exercising.

## PRIOR TO EXERCISE

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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