

## Walk for Your Health

Walking is one of the easiest ways for you to be physically active. The NIH provides these general tips on how to create and follow a walking plan. Walking is inexpensive, and you can walk almost anywhere and at any time. Walking may

Give you more energy and stamina and lift your mood.

Tone your muscles and strengthen your bones.

Increase the number of calories your body uses.

Lower your risk of health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes.

Give you an opportunity to actively socialize with friends and family.

## Know Before You Go

Answer the following questions before you begin a walking program.

Has your health care provider told you that you have heart trouble, diabetes, or asthma?

When you are physically active, do you have pains in your chest, neck, shoulder, or arm?

Do you often feel faint or have dizzy spells?

Do you feel extremely breathless after you have been physically active?

Has your health care provider told you that you have bone or joint problems, such as arthritis?

Are you over 50 years old and not used to doing any moderate physical activity?

Do you smoke?

Do you have a health problem or physical reason not mentioned here that might keep you from starting a walking program?



If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, check with your health care provider before starting a walking program. Usually, he will tell you that walking is a great activity, then give you specific guidelines based on your condition.

## Start Walking Now!

Leave time in your busy schedule to follow a walking program that will work for you. Keep the following points in mind:

Choose a safe place to walk. Find a partner or group to walk with you. Encourage and support each other in committing to walking

regularly even if each of you has a different fitness level or walks at a different pace.

Wear shoes with proper arch support, a firm heel, and thick flexible soles. They will cushion your feet and absorb shock. Before you buy new shoes, walk in them in the store.

Wear clothes that will keep you dry and comfortable. Put on fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin.

Divide your walk into three parts. Warm up slowly, then increase your speed to a brisk walk. This means walking fast enough to elevate your heart rate while still being able to speak comfortably, concentrate, and breathe without effort. Cool down slowly.

Stretch lightly after warm-up and cool-down.

Spread your walking evenly throughout the week. Try to walk at least 3 days each week if you cannot walk daily. Each week, add a few minutes to your walk.

Break up your walk into multiple sessions throughout the day if you have a busy schedule. Make sure each session is at least 10 minutes long. Some physical activity is better than none.

To avoid stiff or sore muscles and joints, start gradually. Over several weeks, begin walking faster, going further, and taking longer walks.

Set goals and reward yourself.

Keep track of your progress with a walking journal or log. Record date, time, and distance.

## **Walk Safely**

Keep safety in mind as you plan when and where you walk.

If you walk at dawn, dusk, or night, wear a reflective vest or brightly colored clothing.

Walk in a group when possible and carry some identification with you, as well as a way to contact someone if you need help.

Notify family and friends of your group's walking time and route.

Do not wear jewelry or headphones.

Be aware of your surroundings.

## **Stretch It Out!**

Stretch gently after you warm up your muscles, and again after you cool down. Try doing the stretches listed below. Do not bounce or hold your breath when you stretch. Perform slow movements and stretch only as far as you feel comfortable.

### Side Reach

Reach one arm over your head and to the side. Keep your hips steady and your shoulders straight to the side. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat on the other side.



### Wall Push

Lean your hands on a wall and place your feet about 3 to 4 feet away from the wall. Bend one knee and point it toward the wall. Keep your back leg straight with your foot flat and your toes pointed straight ahead. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with the other leg.



### Knee Pull

Lean your back against a wall. Keep your head, hips, and feet in a straight line. Pull one knee toward your chest, hold for 10 seconds, and then repeat with the other leg.



### Leg Curl

Pull your right foot toward your buttocks with your right hand. Stand straight and keep your bent knee pointing straight down. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with your other foot and hand.



### Hamstring Stretch

Sit on a sturdy bench or hard surface so that one leg is stretched out on the bench with your toes pointing up. Keep your other foot flat on the surface below. Straighten your back, and if you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh, hold for 10 seconds and then change sides and repeat. If you do not feel a stretch, slowly lean forward from your hips until you feel a stretch.

