

# Walk Your Way to Fitness

**Walking is the single most popular adult exercise in this country. It's safe, easy, cheap, and enjoyable. Best of all, it makes us look and feel great. Studies show that a regular schedule of brisk walking has several benefits.**

- Improves circulation and helps heart and lungs work more efficiently.
- Burns calories to help lose extra pounds or maintain ideal weight. An average 150-pound person walking at 3 miles per hour will burn about 300 calories.
- Eases tension. You can walk to think—or walk to not think.
- Boosts energy.

## ■ What makes a walk a workout?

The short answer is pace and time or distance. When you are walking to exercise, you don't stroll or stop to window shop. After an initial warmup, move at a steady pace that is brisk enough to make your heart beat faster and to cause you to breathe more deeply. Walking needs to be done for at least 30 minutes if your body is to achieve any "training effect." The faster, farther and more frequently you walk, the greater the benefits.

## ■ Use the "talk test"

Benefits are highest when you walk as briskly as your condition permits. The "talk test" can help you find the right pace. If you are too breathless to talk, you're going too fast. If you develop dizziness, pain, nausea, or other unusual symptoms when walking, slow down or stop. If your problem persists, see your physician.

## ■ Frequency is Important

According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans 2018, adults should have at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) to 300 minutes (5 hours) of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week. Brisk walking, 30 minutes on at least five days a week, is one way to meet the goal. If you are tight on time and cannot spare a half hour, break up your activity into shorter sessions. For example:

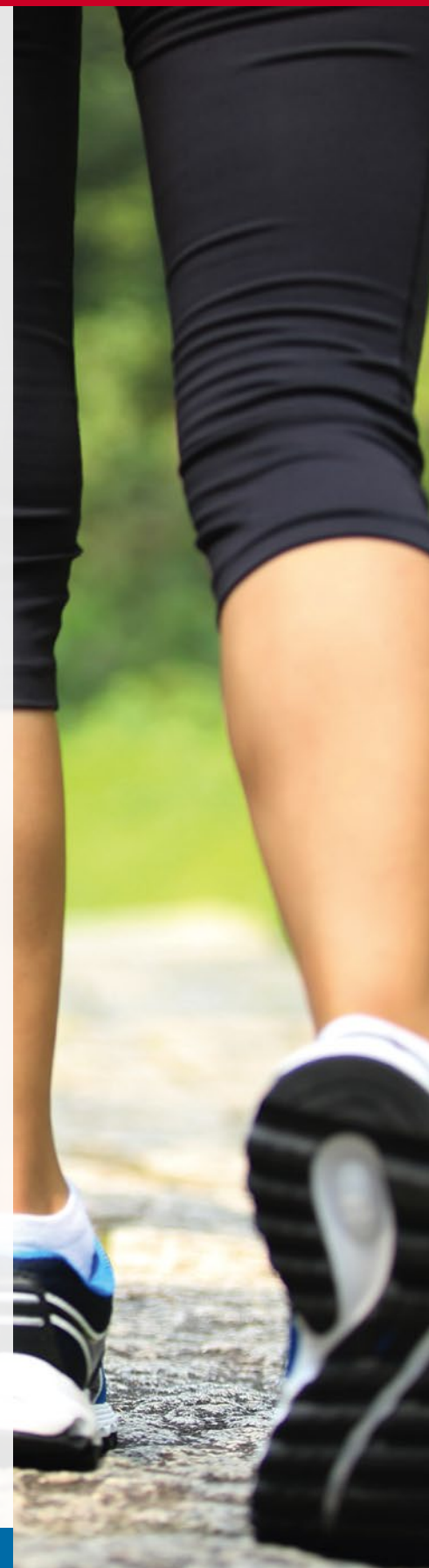
- In the morning, park or get off the bus/train about 10 minutes away from your job.
- At lunch, walk for 10 minutes around where you work, indoors or outdoors.
- At the end of the day, walk briskly for 10 minutes back to car.

## ■ Wondering what to wear?

Choose shoes that are comfortable and provide good support. Cushioned shoes with a slightly elevated heel and arch supports are preferable. A good pair of running shoes are excellent walking shoes.

It's best to get your feet measured at the end of the day when your feet are the largest. Try on shoes with the socks you would wear for walking and walk around the store before you buy. Select loose, comfortable clothes for your walks. In cold weather, it's better to wear several layers of light clothing than one or two heavy layers. The extra layers help to trap heat, and they are easy to shed if you get too warm. To maintain the proper body heat, always wear a cap during cold weather. At night wear light colored clothing or a reflecting band.

**FITNESS CANNOT BE STORED:** *Walking speed is less important than walking time and frequency. Most authorities recommend exercising at least **five times weekly**.*



## ■ Walk with style

These tips will help you feel (and look!) better during and after your walking jaunts.

- Keep your head up, looking forward and back straight. Let your arms swing loosely at your sides with a slight bend at your elbows.
- Stay relaxed, breathe deeply, and take comfortable steps.
- Always land on your heel and roll forward, finally pushing off the ball of your foot. Walking flat-footed or on the balls of your feet may cause fatigue or soreness.
- Toes should point straight ahead. “Toeing-in” and “toeing-out” are inefficient ways of walking and may aggravate or contribute to leg/hip joint problems.
- Always warm up and cool down with 5 minutes of slow walking. Stretch slowly afterwards to improve flexibility and reduce the likelihood of muscle soreness.
- Monitor your speed with the “talk test.”
- Walk safe. Watch for dogs, cars, and bicycles. Face oncoming traffic. Do not assume drivers see you.
- Compete only with yourself. Individuals of similar ages and build vary widely in their capacity for exercise. Focus on steadily improving your own performance.
- Setting goals and keeping track of your progress can be a good motivator. You can set weight loss, step or mileage goals. Use a pedometer to measure the number of steps you take during your walk.

## ■ Tips to get you up and walking

**Early Riser:** Before you go bed, get your walking clothes and shoes ready so it's easy to put them on quickly to start walking. Eat a piece of fruit or yogurt for a quick fuel-up. Wear reflective clothing or carry a light, if still dark.

**Lunchtime Break:** Schedule your lunchtime walk in your work calendar. Think of it as an important appointment. Keep everything you need for walking at work. Recruit some coworkers to join and you can keep each other on track.

**Happy Hour:** Have a light snack about an hour or two before you leave so you don't experience an energy dip and talk yourself out of walking. If it's already dark, wear reflective clothing. End your day off right by releasing built up stress!

## ■ Guidelines for a sample walking program

No one can tell you exactly how far or how fast to walk at the start, but the following guidelines can help you develop a plan for making walking a regular habit. If you've been inactive for a long time, give yourself time to get into shape. Build up slowly using these guidelines as goals—otherwise you might be tempted to push yourself too far too quickly so that walking for exercise stops being enjoyable.

	Warm Up (walk slowly)	Target Zone Exercising (walk briskly)	Cool Down (walk slowly)	Total Time
<b>Week 1</b>	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	15 minutes
<b>Week 2</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 7 minutes	5 minutes	17 minutes
<b>Week 3</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 9 minutes	5 minutes	19 minutes
<b>Week 4</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 11 minutes	5 minutes	21 minutes
<b>Week 5</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 13 minutes	5 minutes	23 minutes
<b>Week 6</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 15 minutes	5 minutes	25 minutes
<b>Week 7</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 18 minutes	5 minutes	28 minutes
<b>Week 8</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 20 minutes	5 minutes	30 minutes
<b>Week 9</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 23 minutes	5 minutes	33 minutes
<b>Week 10</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 26 minutes	5 minutes	36 minutes
<b>Week 11</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 28 minutes	5 minutes	38 minutes
<b>Week 12</b>	5 minutes	Walk briskly 30 minutes	5 minutes	40 minutes

Source: “Exercise and Your Heart” National Institutes of Health (1981)

## For more information visit these websites:

[Human Sciences Extension and Outreach \(www.extension.iastate.edu/humanosciences\)](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/humanosciences)

[Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Store \(store.extension.iastate.edu\)](http://store.extension.iastate.edu)

[Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans 2018 \(www.health.gov/paguidelines\)](http://www.health.gov/paguidelines)

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