

# Walking

## Walking: Rx for Health, Happiness

For a healthier, happier lifestyle, try walking--the most popular form of exercise.

It's easy, safe, and inexpensive. It's also relaxing and at the same time invigorating, requires little athletic skill, and does not call for club membership or special equipment other than sturdy, comfortable shoes. And it is fun and natural--good for your mind and self-esteem.

The results of walking are physically rewarding--a trim, fit body better able to enhance general health and add enjoyable years to your life.

Fundamental walking--also called healthwalking--can be done almost anywhere and at any time, year around--to the store, in the mall, or in your neighborhood; alone, with your dog, or with others; and at your own pace. It is simple, uncomplicated--physical fitness at your leisure.

Walking benefits most everybody, regardless of age. About 67 million men and women are walking regularly. Convinced that it is good exercise, they're making it a part of their daily routine. And their numbers are increasing every year, according to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

## A Sure Way To Fitness

For those with a long history of inactivity, problems with obesity, or who just don't like strenuous activity, walking is an excellent way to begin an exercise program. You can start slowly, then increase your speed and maintain a steady pace. A good conditioning program begins with moderation and dedication.

Podiatric and family physicians recommend walking to ease or ward off a number of physically related ills. Walking can help you:

- Strengthen your heart and lungs, and improve circulation.
- Prevent heart attacks and strokes.
- Reduce obesity and high blood pressure.
- Boost your metabolic rate.
- Favorably alter your cholesterol.
- Improve muscle tone in your legs and abdomen.
- Reduce stress and tension.
- Reduce arthritis pain; stop bone tissue decay.

## Walking: There's An Art To It

Before you start walking, some simple warmup exercises--but not strenuous, advanced stretching--can give your muscles added flexibility. Body twists at the waist, in a slow hula-hoop motion, and a few toe-touching or knee-bend exercises are appropriate. When you're ready to begin, the best way to start is walking 20 uninterrupted minutes at least three times a week. Walk at a comfortable pace, slowing down if you find yourself breathing heavily. Don't tire yourself. If 20 minutes is too much, cut back to 10 or 15 minutes. You can gradually increase your time and pace as your body adapts to the exercise.

There are several ways to measure your pace. One is to walk on routes which you have pre-measured with your car's odometer. Perhaps the simplest is to use a wristwatch. Count the number of steps you take in a 15-second period; if you're taking 15 in that time, you're walking about two miles an hour. At about 23, you're probably going three miles an hour, and at 30, the pace is close to four miles an hour.

You may want to keep an activity log, in which you jot down the dates, times, and estimated distances of your walks, plus other notes, such as routes, milestones, and incidental experiences.

### **Some Walking Tips:**

- Move at a steady pace, brisk enough to make your heart beat faster. Breathe more deeply.
- Walk with your head erect, back straight, abdomen flat. Keep your legs out front and your knees slightly bent.
- Swing your arms freely at your sides.
- As you walk, land on the heel of your foot and roll forward to push off on the ball of your foot.
- At least at the beginning, confine your walks to level stretches of flat surfaces, avoiding excessively steep hills and embanked roadways.
- If you're walking in the evening, be sure to wear clothing with reflective material sewn in, or otherwise attached.
- Cool down after a long, brisk walk to help pump blood back up from your legs to where it's needed. Here's where some stretching exercises can be helpful. A good one is standing about three feet from a wall, with your hands flat on the wall. Then take five or six small steps backward, maintaining your hand contact with the wall. Repeat the exercise five to ten times.

### **Racewalking**

Racewalking is a very specific technique that's used by walkers for both fitness and competition. It has greater aerobic benefits than healthwalking, since it is faster and increases the heartbeat rate.

If you get to the point where you think racewalking is for you, there are clubs which can be contacted in most places.

### **Walking Footwear: Comfort and Fit**

Choose a good quality, lightweight walking shoe with breathable upper materials, such as leather or nylon mesh. The heel counter should be very firm; the heel should have reduced cushioning to position the heel closer to the ground for walking stability. The front or forefoot area of the shoe should have adequate support and flexibility.

Fit is very important. Go to a reputable store and have **both** shoes fitted for length and width with the socks you'll be using. (Do this late in the afternoon, since your feet do swell enough during the day to affect your shoe size.) Make sure the shoe is snug but not too tight over the sock. The shoe should have plenty of room for the toes to move around. Several walking shoes have qualified to use the APMA Seal of Acceptance.

Your choice of athletic socks is also important. Sports podiatrists frequently recommend appropriately padded socks of acrylic fiber. Acrylic fibers tend to "wick" away excessive perspiration, which active feet can produce from 250,000 sweat glands at a rate of four to six ounces a day, or even more.

Again, there are popular brands of athletic socks which are authorized to use APMA's Seal of Acceptance.

### **Some Other Tips**

- Check on the shoe width; it must comfortably accommodate the width of the ball of your foot.
- Make sure you get good arch support.
- See that the top of the heel counter of the shoe is properly cushioned and does not bite into the heel or touch the ankle bones.

### **Do You Need A Checkup?**

If you are free of serious health problems, you can start walking with confidence. Walking is not strenuous; it involves almost no risk to health. You should, of course, exercise good judgment, not exceed the limits of your condition, and not walk outdoors during extreme weather periods, until you have a good walking program established.

You should, however, consult your family or podiatric physician before you begin a walking regimen. A checkup is suggested, particularly if you are over 60, have a disease or disability, or are taking medication. It is also recommended for those who are 35-60, substantially overweight, easily fatigued, excessive smokers, or have been physically inactive.

One of your physicians will help you determine your proper walking heart rate. Heart rate is widely accepted as a good method for measuring intensity during walking and other physical activities. The formula says that subtracting your age from the number 220 yields your maximum heart rate (beats per minute), and that the proper walking rate is 60-70 percent of that number. For a 50-year-old, that's 220 minus 50 equals 170; 60 percent of that is 102 and 70 percent is 119. Other factors should be considered, though; a physician's advice is the best indicator of your correct rate.

You are now ready to begin a walking program. It is a prescription for a healthier, happier life.

### **Shoe Tips**

- Check on the shoe width; it must comfortably accommodate the width of the ball of your foot.
- Make sure you get good arch support.
- See that the top of the heel counter of the shoe is properly cushioned and does not bite into the heel or touch the ankle bones.