



# WALKING 101

A Beginner's Guide to Fitness Walking

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Walking is one of the most accessible, safe and rewarding forms of exercise you can do. Benefits of regular walking can include prevention of heart disease and diabetes. Walking reduces risk of osteoporosis and arthritis as well as assists in weight loss, reduced stress and better strength. It improves sleep, stamina and mood! *Let's get moving...*

It is important to make sure that you are wearing comfortable supportive shoes and that you have an awareness of basic walking technique. Think of your walk as a good time to also improve your posture. Walk with your eyes up on the horizon, shoulders back and chest lifted. Engage your abdominal muscles to support your back by pulling the belly in and up. Roll from your heel through your toe and let your arms swing comfortably at about a 90° bend in the elbow.

The idea is to establish something that you can stick with. It is important to start where you are and build slowly and gradually on that. Too much too soon will only be discouraging. Begin with a "test walk" of approximately 15 minutes. Tune in to your body and notice how it feels. On a scale of 1-10 the exertion should feel approximately a 5 (moderate, or about 50% of your max heart rate). If 15 minutes feels like too much, start with 10. If it is easy, bump it up to 20 minutes and go from there. Stick with your starting amount for a week and then add 2-5 minutes each week. So a sample plan might look something like this:

- WEEK 1:** Walk 15 minutes 3-5 times per week.
- WEEK 2:** Walk 20 minutes 3-5 times per week
- WEEK 3:** Walk 25 minutes 3-5 times and so forth

Adjust according to how you are feeling. There is no need to rush. Enjoy the process of the progress. In this manner you can build gradually up to an hour of steady walking, which is just about average to get you through a 5K (3.1 miles)!

#### A FEW OTHER TIPS:

- Take time to warm up your muscles by walking more slowly at first. Finish with a nice stretch of your thighs, calves, hips and back. Stretching will help you limber up and prevent injury.
- Recruit a walking buddy. This is a great chance to spend time with a friend doing something good for your health. Support one another with regular walking dates.
- Choose a walking area that you enjoy and feel comfortable in. Make it convenient so that all you have to do is lace up your shoes and head out.
- Drink plenty of water before and after your walk.

I have designed this plan around time, but you can use distance markers as well with the same approach ("stop sign today, next week the big elm tree").

*\*Be sure to consult your doctor prior to beginning if you have any health concerns.*