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# FITNESS FIRST: WALKING

If you are looking for an easy and inexpensive way to stay healthy or lose weight, you need nothing more than your own two feet.

Walking is an ideal form of exercise; it's free, and you can do it almost anytime and anywhere.

Walking is also a great way to maintain a healthy weight or to shed those extra pounds.

## The First Step: Good Shoes

Whether you walk outdoors, on a treadmill or at the local mall, you will want to invest in a good pair of walking shoes. Walking shoes are designed to give you the flexibility, proper support and the proper push off needed for walking. Everyone's feet are different, but look for shoes that are light, flexible and immediately feel comfortable. Walking shoes should not require a "breaking in" period.

## Setting the Pace

You can walk to maintain your health or as part of a weight-loss program. To get moving, experts advise beginners to start with a 15 or 30 minute walk daily, adding five or 10 minutes to the walking session time per week. More specifically:

- To maintain your health, walk 30 minutes a day most days of the week at a "talking" pace, which means you are able to carry on a

conversation comfortably while walking.

- If you are walking for weight loss, walk 45 to 60 minutes a day at a medium to fast pace. In addition, do not skip more than two days per week.
- For aerobic and cardiovascular fitness, walk 20 minutes at a very fast pace (you should be breathing hard), three to four days a week.

After walking, gentle stretching can increase your range of motion and also helps keep your muscles from being sore. It is also wise to warm up before walking fast or going a long distance.

## Cautions

Make sure to be safe while walking outside:

- Always walk on sidewalks (or on the left side of the street facing traffic if there are no sidewalks).
- Be aware of traffic.
- Carry an ID and your cell phone (or change to use a pay phone) in case of emergencies.
- In the evening hours, wear reflective gear and/or carry a flashlight in front of you.

## Going the Distance

Once you get started, you will want to stay motivated. Consider finding a walking friend, joining a walking club or registering for a challenging walking event. Remember that you will not notice immediate physical changes to your body, but by adding walking and a healthy diet to your daily routine, it won't be long before you look *and* feel better!

*Note: Before beginning any walking program, consider discussing your exercise plans with your doctor, particularly if you have unique health issues, such as diabetes.*



## Start counting your steps...

Use a pedometer, which records the amount of steps that you take. Most experts recommend taking 10,000 steps a day. This may seem impossible, but little changes in daily activity such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking a little farther away and getting up during sedentary activities can make all the difference.