

# WALKING... A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Walking is one of the easiest ways to be active. You can do it almost anywhere and at any time. Walking is also a low-cost way to get exercise and be healthy. All you need is a pair of comfortable shoes.

## HEALTH NOTES



### For more information

#### Visit [kp.org](http://kp.org)

- Click on Health Topics A to Z and read about walking in the Health Encyclopedia.
- Sign-up for a free, online personalized Healthy Lifestyles Program to help you manage your weight, quit smoking, manage stress, or improve your eating and physical activity habits.
- Sign-up for the 10,000 Steps® Program to track your daily steps and physical activity online using a step counter.

#### Visit [everybodywalk.org](http://everybodywalk.org)

- Join the Every Body Walk program or a walking group.

#### Call Kaiser Permanente Medical Advice

- Talk to your medical advice nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling (703) 359-7878 or 1-800-777-7904. TTY: 711.

Walking will:

- Give you more energy.
- Make you feel good.
- Help you relax.
- Reduce stress.
- Help you sleep better.
- Tone your muscles.
- Help control your appetite and weight.
- Increase the number of calories your body uses.
- Help you manage and possibly prevent common conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure.

For all these reasons, people have started walking programs. If you would like to start your own program, read and follow this guide.

### Is it okay to walk?

**Answer the following questions before you begin a walking program:**

- Has your doctor or member of your health care team ever told you that you have heart trouble or high blood pressure?
- When you exercise, do you have pains in your chest or on your left side (neck, shoulder, or arm)?
- Do you often feel faint or have dizzy spells?
- Do you feel very breathless after mild activity?
- Has your doctor or member of your health care team told you that you have bone or joint problems, like arthritis, that could get worse if you exercise?
- Are you over 50 years old and not used to exercising?
- Do you have a condition or physical reason not mentioned here that might interfere with an exercise program?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, please check with your doctor or member of your health care team before starting a walking program or other form of physical activity.

## Setting goals

Whatever your reason for starting a walking program (to lose weight, prevent disease, etc.), set realistic goals. The best way to make a lifestyle change is to take it one step at a time.

- Set individual goals you can reach. For example, set a one-month goal that you will walk three times a week for 15 minutes.
- Make sure your goals can be measured and track them. Miles? Steps? Inches lost?

Write your goal here: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- When you reach your first goal, reward yourself and set another one. Don't give up if you don't reach the goal on the first try. Stick to it! It's not easy to make a behavior change, but should get easier each time you try.
- Keep a record of what you do, including how you feel. Make notes on a calendar or in a journal. You can purchase a pedometer to track your mileage or steps.
- Gradually increase your frequency, intensity, and time that you walk to your goal level.
- Vary your routine. Choose different places to walk. Use a walking exercise video or audio tape. Participate in community walking events.

## Starting a walking program

It is important to design a program that works for you. In planning your walking program, keep these points in mind:

- Choose a safe place to walk. When walking alone, carry identification and/or tell a friend or family member your walking route. If you like to walk with others, find a partner or group of people to walk with you. Your walking partner(s) should be able to walk with you on the same schedule and at the same speed.
- Wear shoes with thick, flexible soles that will cushion your feet and absorb shock.
- Wear clothes that are right for the season. Cotton clothes for the summer help to keep you cool by absorbing sweat and allowing it to

evaporate. Layer your clothing in the winter so, as you warm up, you can take off some layers.

- Think of your walk in three parts. Warm up by walking slowly for five minutes. Increase your speed for the next five minutes. Finally, to cool down, walk slowly again for five minutes.
- Stretch after walking.
- Try to walk at least three times per week. Add two-to-three minutes per week to the fast or brisk walk. If you walk less than three times per week, increase the fast walk more slowly.
- To avoid stiff or sore muscles or joints, start gradually. Over several weeks, begin walking faster, going farther, and walking for longer periods of time. Build up to 30 minutes or more of walking on most, if not all, days of the week.
- The more you walk, the better you will feel. You also use more calories.

## Safety tips

Keep safety in mind when you plan your routine and the time of your walk.

- Walk in the daytime or at night in well-lighted areas.
- Walk in a group or with a partner if possible.
- Do not use hand-held weights or ankle weights, because of the risk of injury.
- Try to carry a small water bottle in a pouch or take frequent sips from a water fountain to prevent dehydration.
- Do not wear jewelry.
- If you wear headphones, keep the volume down.
- Use sunscreen of at least SPF 15 if walking outside during daylight hours.
- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Contact your medical advice nurse, your doctor, or member of your health care team if you experience any chest pain, extreme difficulty breathing, or think you may have an injury, like a knee or ankle sprain. Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to (703) 359-7878 or 1-800-777-7904 or (703) 359-7616, TTY: 411. If you have a medical emergency, call 911. If you are unsure if your condition is a medical emergency, call 1-800-677-1112, TTY: 411.

## Taking the first step

Walking right is very important.

- Walk with your chin up and your shoulders held slightly back.
- Walk so that the heel of your foot touches the ground first. Roll your weight forward.
- Walk with your knees and feet pointing forward.
- Swing or pump your arms as you walk.

## Setting your walking pace

During your brisk walking phase, use the scale to the right to help you estimate how hard you are working. For example, sitting in a chair would be “very, very light” activity, around 6 or 7 on the scale. A brisk walk may put you around 13 on the scale and walking as fast as you can may feel like a 15.

The goal is to walk in a zone between “fairly light” and “somewhat hard,” but not to the point of being short of breath. One doctor describes the right level of effort this way: If you can talk without any trouble at all, your activity is probably too easy. If you can’t talk at all, it’s too hard.

## Start Steppin’ Out

Through the Kaiser Permanente Steppin’ Out program, you can plan and track your walking activity level. Simply purchase a step counter at any Kaiser Permanente pharmacy and you’ll receive instructions, a guide book, and a log sheet.

To track your steps and goals online, sign up for the 10,000 Steps® Program at [kp.org/10000steps](http://kp.org/10000steps).

## Every Body Walk

The Every Body Walk campaign is an on-line walking resource that can help you increase your level of physical activity. The web site contains tips and tricks to maintaining a walking routine, calculator tools, videos and more. You can start or find a walking group near you. Learn more today at [everybodywalk.org](http://everybodywalk.org).

## Perceived exertion scale

How does your walking feel?	Rating scale
Very, very light	6 – 8
Very light	9 – 10
Fairly light	11 – 12
Somewhat hard	13 – 14
Hard	15 – 16
Very hard	17 – 18
Very, very hard	19 – 20

## Stretching after walking

After you walk, stretching helps prevent muscle soreness and can help you become more flexible. Try the exercises here, holding each stretch for at least 30 seconds. Remember not to bounce when you stretch. Perform slow movements and stretch only as far as you feel comfortable. Repeat each stretch 2-3 times.



**Calf stretch.** Stand facing a wall or chair holding on for balance. Bend one knee and point it toward the wall or chair. Keep your back leg straight and toes pointed straight ahead. Both heels should remain flat on the floor or ground. You should feel the stretch in the back of your leg.

Repeat on the other side.



**Hamstring stretch.** Keeping the knee slightly bent, bring one leg up. Holding behind the thigh with both hands, straighten the leg until a gentle stretch is felt in the back of your thigh.

Keep your buttocks and back down. Do not lift your leg. Repeat on the other side.



**Quadriceps stretch.** Stand on one leg while holding onto a stable surface, like a chair, wall, or bench. Bend your other leg and pull your foot in toward your buttock using the opposite hand. Note that your bent knee is pointing to the floor and your legs are parallel. Your hips should be facing forward. You should feel the

stretch in the front of your thigh. Repeat on the other side.



**Shoulder stretch.** Stand with your feet flat on the floor, back straight, and stomach tucked. Bend one arm and bring it across the chest, keeping the shoulder down. Gently apply pressure to the back of the upper arm, just above the elbow, using the opposite hand. You should feel the stretch in your shoulder.

Repeat on the other side.



**Back stretch.** Stand with your feet flat on the floor, back straight, and stomach tucked. Interlock the fingers in front of you, turning the palms out. Extend the arms in front at shoulder height. You should feel the stretch in your middle back and shoulders.

### Walking can work for you

- Walk to lunch spots.
- Take a short walk during breaks at work.
- Get off public transportation a few stops early and walk home.
- Join a walking club or program at an area mall.
- Walk with your family.
- Walk in scenic areas, such as parks and on trails.
- Listen to your favorite music or a book while walking.
- If on some days you have a hard time fitting walking into your schedule, break it up into three, 10-minute sessions throughout the day.

### Sample walking program

	Warm-up time	Fast walk time*	Cool-down time	Total time
Week 1	5 minutes slow	5 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	15 minutes
Week 2	5 minutes slow	8 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	18 minutes
Week 3	5 minutes slow	11 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	21 minutes
Week 4	5 minutes slow	14 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	24 minutes
Week 5	5 minutes slow	17 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	27 minutes
Week 6	5 minutes slow	20 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	30 minutes
Week 7	5 minutes slow	23 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	33 minutes
Week 8	5 minutes slow	26 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	36 minutes
Week 9 & beyond	5 minutes slow	30 minutes fast	5 minutes slow	40 minutes

\* If you walk less than three times per week, increase the fast walk time more slowly.

Adapted from Weight-Control Information Network (WIN), National Institutes of Health, NIDDK, US DHHS, PHS, Walking... A Step in the Right Direction, #01-4155, March 2001.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent medical problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor or member of your health care team.

#### REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION, HEALTH PROMOTION AND WOMEN'S HEALTH

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