

Walking for fitness

Your metric guide to walking for fitness or to reduce your body mass

The first stage in getting fitter and reducing your body mass may not be starting another diet. It might be as simple as going for a walk.

People often worry about how much food energy they take in, but then they forget about, or ignore, the other side of the same issue — how much of their food energy goes out.

Using more food energy by increasing your activity might be a more successful way for you to decrease your body mass, without any pills or diets. Even if your body mass doesn't change, you will definitely feel fitter if you develop and follow your own walking program.

Walking also helps you shift your attitude toward your health, your fitness, and your body mass. Plan on taking a full year to move through the 3 stage program below. This means taking a leisurely 4 months for each stage. Don't rush — change won't happen overnight.

Stage 1: Just get out and walk

Your walking goals are

- ◇ to find opportunities through your day to go for short walks.
- ◇ to enjoy your walks.
- ◇ to feel invigorated and happy after each walk.
- ◇ to realise that speed is not important during this first stage.
- ◇ to recognise if your walks are becoming painful in any way and if so to cut back immediately; you don't have to hurt to feel better.
- ◇ to plan positive but gradual lifestyle changes that include a 10 minute walk each day.
- ◇ to develop the habit of 'going for a walk' every day.

Tips, notes, and suggestions

Build a daily walking habit. Think of it as being more active than you used to be. Don't change your clothes; don't go to a gym; and definitely don't jump around for hours.

Just take a short walk to the bus stop, the mailbox, or the local store for some bread or milk. In the beginning how far (or how fast) you walk isn't important.

What is important is simply going for short walks on most days of the week. Be careful not to overdo it — once you start regular walking, you'll want to walk further.

If you like numbers, buy and wear a pedometer to count your paces. Find ways to add a minimum of an extra 1 000 paces into your daily activities. A 10 minute walk at about 120 paces per minute is 1 200 paces. You might even like to break that up into 2 five minute walks of 600 paces each.

Your overall goal in Stage 1 is to develop the habit of 'going for a walk' every day. Note that this program doesn't give you a choice about how often you walk — every day is the right time to take a short walk.

Plan for poor weather. Walk around a shopping mall. Walk from end to end of a large office, factory, or warehouse.

Stage 2: Walk further and for longer

Your walking goals are

- ◇ to continue to find new opportunities to go for short walks.
- ◇ to walk more vigorously but still feel happy after each walk.
- ◇ to recognise if your walks are becoming painful in any way and if so to cut back immediately; you don't have to hurt to feel better.
- ◇ to gradually increase to a minimum of 20 minutes walking each day and then to slowly increase the walk on one day each week to 40 minutes. A gradual increase is by about 10 % each week.

Tips, notes, and suggestions

As you start to increase your walking distance you'll begin to feel fitter and you might also begin to see that your body mass is reducing. If you don't see a reduction in your body mass, it may be because you are building muscle — muscle is heavier than fat.

It's surprising how far you can go in 40 minutes of walking time. You will walk 4 kilometres in 40 minutes at an average speed of 100 metres per minute.

Any increase in walking duration uses more food energy, increases your loss of body mass, and builds strength, especially if you get off the beaten path and walk up and down some hills.

Find a map of where you live or work (a search engine, such as Google, can do this). Use the scale on the map to find landmarks that are 1, 2, and 3 kilometres away or you can use GPS. You can use this to (say) walk 2 kilometres to somewhere local and back at a brisk pace. At 100 metres per minute, this will take 40 minutes — twenty minutes out and twenty minutes back. As an example, when I did this, I discovered that our local Post Office is a little over a kilometre from home — I now choose to walk the 20 minutes to the Post Office as one of my additional walks more than I did previously.

If you don't know how far you walked, multiply the time you walked in minutes by 100. For example, if you walked for 18 minutes, multiply by 100 to get 1800 metres, then write this down as 1.8 kilometres. This works because most of us naturally walk at close to 100 metres per minute (See 'Measuring your walking speed' below).

Start a walking activity logbook. Note your daily activity and tally your daily, weekly, and monthly totals. You'll grow to hate having to write down 'o' for any day. This logbook will prove to be a great motivator, especially when you see all those kilometres start to build up. Make copies of the last page of this article to get your logbook started.

Stage 3: Walk faster with variations

Your walking goals are

- ◇ to continue to find new opportunities to go for short walks throughout your daily activities.
- ◇ to walk for 30 minutes (in total) every day and to walk for 60 minutes on one day each week.
- ◇ to walk more vigorously but still feel invigorated and happy after each walk.
- ◇ to recognise if your walks are becoming painful in any way and if so to cut back immediately; you don't have to hurt to feel better.
- ◇ to walk in a 5 kilometre (5 km) or 10 kilometre (10 km) walking event such as a corporate cup, fun run/walk, or a fund-raising walk.

Tips, notes, and suggestions

Load your favourite songs into your iPod or play your favourite CD. Choose random play, and whatever song comes up, walk at that tempo.

Use this 1 to 10 scale of exertion to measure your endurance. Think of 1 as watching TV, 2 as just standing around, 4 as walking along casually, 6 as walking briskly, 8 as fast walking, and 10 is as fast as you can go (you will be sucking in air as fast and as hard as you can). Twice a week, crank up your walking effort to an 8 or even a 9 on a steep hill for a few minutes. Then you will be using food energy rapidly and building real aerobic fitness through your walking program.

On your long walk each week go fast enough to break into a sweat and to breathe hard for a few minutes.

Begin to think about building up to a half-day walk or even longer on a weekend. Find out about good places to walk, such as botanical gardens, conservation parks, state parks, national parks, along a river, or along a rail trail. Go for a half-day stroll through a bird sanctuary or take a picnic and walk on the beach. Find out about walking groups in your area and go on an organised walk with a group.

Vary your walks by having 2 easy days, 2 fast days, 2 hilly days, and a long walk day.

Try a treadmill. A friend of mine walks on her treadmill when her favourite soapy is shown on television — her program lasts for 60 minutes so that's how long she walks. This may also be one of the reasons why she has achieved her present great age.

Treadmills can be boring, but you can spice up your treadmill walking by using the elevation adjustments to give a sense of walking outside. Pretend to go up and down hills by varying your elevations and speeds. Create your own training program with hills. You can even place a fan in front of the treadmill to create natural cooling from the wind you'd expect to get when you're on an outside walk.

By now, you will be noticing marked improvements in your health, but not necessarily on your scales. You may still be turning fat into muscle. Your best measure is how you feel about yourself.

You might like to copy from my brother-in-law who uses a pedometer and then adds his daily distance into a spreadsheet on his computer. In the last 5 months he has walked just under a thousand kilometres.

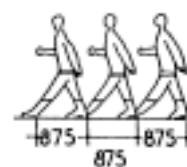
Finding your walking speed

Find an athletics track — it will be marked in a circuit 400 metres long. Time yourself around the track as accurately as you can. Work out your speed in metres per minute.

Time how long it takes for you to walk the length of an Olympic size swimming pool. As these are exactly 50 metres long you can calculate your speed in metres per second and then multiply this by 60 to get your speed in metres per minute.

If walking tracks or other accurately measured distances aren't available, here's another way to figure out how fast you walk.

Your normal walking pace will be unique to you and it will probably be somewhere between 600 millimetres and 900 millimetres. Measure a 10 metre (10 000 mm) section of path and count the number of paces you take to walk it (do this a few times to get an average number of paces). If, for example, you average 14 paces then each pace is about 700 millimetres ($10\,000 \div 14 = 714$ mm — say 700 mm). Note that by using millimetres you reduce problems with fractions.



Then to calculate your walking speed, count the number of paces you take when you walk for a minute, and multiply that number by the length of your pace. This will give you your speed in metres per minute.

If you walk at 120 paces per minute and your pace is 750 mm (0.75 metres), you will be walking at 90 metres per minute ($120 \times 0.75 = 90$ m/min), and if you walk for an hour 90 metres multiplied by 60 minutes equals 5.4 km ($90 \times 60 = 5400$ metres = 5.4 km). It's surprising how far you can walk in an hour.



People in marching bands and the military are trained to march with a pace that is exactly 750 millimetres long, which means that they don't use too much energy and they can keep going at this speed for quite long distances. So if you're walking for your health, the marching pace of 90 metres per minute is about right.

If you are walking to reduce your body mass, you'll have to pick up the pace to a brisk 140 paces (or 100 metres) per minute.

Aerobic fitness effects begin at 160 paces (or 115 metres) per minute, but this speed is relatively difficult to do. You might find that you can pick up your speed by raising the height of your hands — keep your wrists above your waist.

As an extreme example, in April 2005, the Athens Olympics bronze medal walker, Nathan Deakes from Geelong in Australia, walked 20 kilometres in 1 hour 17 minutes and 33 seconds — the world's fastest time for 20 kilometres in 2005. In this walk Nathan averaged 15.5 kilometres per hour; 258 metres per minute; or 4.3 metres per second.

We all have different fitness levels and different fitness goals. To achieve the results you want, it is important to get the correct speed for your exercise walking — the speed that's just right for you.

Walking speeds

Here are some examples to help you find the speed that's right for you.

Speed Walkers	metres per minute	metres per second	kilometres per hour	Fitness comments
Grandparents and grandchildren	60 m/min	1 m/s	3.5 km/h	There's plenty of time. Who wants to walk fast anyway? Goal: to walk as far as you like while still feeling comfortable.
Beginner	80 m/min	1.3 m/s	5 km/h	Walk as slowly as you like for 10 minutes. Goal: to develop the habit of 'going for a walk' every day.
Improving	90 m/min	1.5 m/s	5.5 km/h	You are regularly active in fitness activities 3 or more times each week. Goal: to increase your speed to 1 kilometre in 10 minutes (100 m/min).
Intermediate	100 m/min	1.7 m/s	6 km/h	You are regularly active in fitness activities 5 or more times each week for 4 months. Goal: to walk 20 minute each day with one day as a long walk of 40 minutes.
Advanced	110 m/min	1.8 m/s	6.5 km/h	You are in good shape and have exercised 5 or more times a week for 8 months. Goal: to walk 30 minute each day with one day a week as a long walk of 60 minutes.
Peak fitness	120 m/min	2.0 m/s	7 km/h	You are an athlete who could walk competitively in amateur competitions. Goal: 40 minutes each day with one day a week as a long walk of 120 minutes.
Olympic Champion	258 m/min	4.3 m/s	15 km/h	You are an extremely fit athlete. Goal: 40 minutes each day with 2 days easy, 2 days fast, 2 days on hills, and 4 hours for your long day.
World record holder	260 m/min	4.4 m/s	16 km/h	If you can walk at this speed for 20 km, you will be the world champion and you will also hold the world race walking record.

Your walking logbook

Stage

Log for the month of _____ Started on _____ / ____ / ____

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Week total
Month total							

Log for the month of _____

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Week total
Month total							

Log for the month of _____

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Week total
Month total							

Log for the month of _____

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Week total
Month total							