

All About Walking – Hints and Tips



Walking is the closest activity to perfect exercise, the most sustainable means of transport and Britain's most popular outdoor recreation by far. Almost everyone can enjoy walking, there's no need for specialist skills and equipment, and you can walk almost anywhere at any time for as long or as short a time as you choose. It's ideal for building exercise into your everyday life, offers a great escape from the stress of modern living and provides the best way to explore your local environment.

Health Benefits

- Walking can help prevent and manage heart disease.
- Walking reduces the risk of having a stroke.
- Regular walking can help strengthen bones.
- Exercise can reduce anxiety, loneliness and depression.
- Exercise can increase feelings of independence.
- Physical activity can improve balance, co-ordination and joint flexibility, which can help prevent falls.

Questions and Answers

Surely walking is too easy to have a beneficial effect on health?

No. Research shows that for adults at least 30 minutes of walking five days a week can benefit general health, even if undertaken in three ten minute bursts a day. For best results, walk fast without exerting yourself too much. You should just about be able to talk while you walk. For effective weight loss, an hour a day is recommended. Every step counts in improving your health. Doctors currently recommend 10,000 steps a day for good health, but many of us achieve less than a third of this total. Regular walking can improve your heart and circulation, lower blood pressure, improve flexibility and strength, boost your immune system, improve your mental health and well-being and help protect against a wide range of health problems including heart disease and diabetes. Most people also find walking is cheaper, more attractive and much easier to fit into their lives on a regular basis than gym-based exercise or organised sport.

I live in a town. Won't I have to drive to the countryside to walk?

No. You can reach good places to walk from your doorstep. Walking your way to health initiatives are operating in five villages/towns in South Holland, and many of the local routes can be found in the South Holland Walks section.

How far and how fast should I be walking?

If you're walking for health, it's easiest to measure your walking by time rather than distance. Walking briskly for 30 minutes five days a week will do you some good whatever your walking speed. The benefits will increase if you can afford more time to walk, and as you get fitter you'll find you're walking faster with the same amount of exertion. Start with short, easy walks and build up as you get a feel for your own capabilities. It's better to find a walk slightly too easy than get stiff and sore through overstretching yourself.

How can I encourage my children to walk more?

Rather than simply suggesting going for a walk, make it a trip to do something else the children will find interesting and that incidentally involves some walking - a visit to an event, a field to fly a kite, a park or recreation ground, a museum, railway, visitor attraction or a visit to a friend. Keep the walk itself short and easy, appropriate to their age and ability. Allow plenty of time for breaks, take a picnic or include a visit to a pub or café that welcomes children. Include points of interest along the way: plants and animals, geological features, buildings and ruins and so on. Old railway lines, waterside walks and nature trails will have lots to look at. Go at the child's pace and avoid pushing them on if they get tired or bad-tempered. Consider letting your child walk to school: not only is this good exercise, it is also sociable and has been shown to improve academic performance. Many schools now have 'safe routes' and some have 'walking buses' where adults supervise a group of children walking to school. Ask the school for more information.

Don't I need lots of expensive equipment to go walking?

No. You can walk on easy paths in urban areas, parks and lowland countryside with just ordinary, warm, comfortable clothing, a pair of good, comfortable shoes or trainers, plus a small backpack if you're going off on a longer walk and want to take some food, drink and a spare top. If you start taking regular, longer walks a waterproof jacket is a good investment, and a pair of proper walking boots if you want to use rougher, more rural paths.