



Become a
**Walking
Warrior**

Walking is an incredible form of exercise – it requires no gym membership, fancy equipment, or innate athletic ability. Whether you're young or just young at heart, getting out and walking is one of the easiest and most effective ways to get yourself moving no matter where you live or what your level of fitness may be.

While some high-intensity workout gurus may doubt the true benefits of a walking routine, they are most definitely wrong. Walking is one of the most researched forms of exercise, is linked to more than a dozen health benefits, and is touted by the likes of the American Heart Association, American Stroke Association, and American Diabetes Association, among many others.

For the Health of It – Why Should You Walk?

Keep Your Heart Happy

Walking has been proven to improve many cardiovascular risk factors, including blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol. With heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes all linked to these problems, walking (especially brisk walking) is a great way to improve your overall heart health.

Live a Longer Life

According to the American Heart Association, your life expectancy may increase by two hours for every hour of brisk walking. Yes, you read that right! Every hour you walk can help you live longer.

Boost Your Mood

Exercise in general, and walking specifically, has been proven to help improve your mood and help ease depression. A 2015 Australian study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* highlighted promising results after evaluating nearly 2,000 middle-aged women with depressive symptoms. The study indicated that those who walked 200 minutes or more per week (about 30 minutes per day) reported benefits such as increased energy and better emotional health.

Keep Your Intestines

Moving. As reported in a 2008 issue of the *Journal of Gastrointestinal & Liver Diseases*, walking after a meal has been shown to help accelerate digestion. Keeping your GI tract moving and happy can help reduce GI symptoms and make you feel better overall.

Age Gracefully

Walking can help you maintain your balance and coordination – both important skills to maintain as we age. Health experts cite balance as a critical skill to keep up in order to prevent falls, reduce risk of injury, and much more. It's also known as a "use-it-or-lose-it" type of skill, so a regular walking routine is a great way to maintain balance and coordination without the risks that come with a more intense workout regimen.

Stay Strong

Weight-bearing exercise is a great way to maintain both your bone health and muscle strength, and walking is one of the easiest ways to do

it. According to American Bone Health, a non-profit organization committed to improving bone health and reducing osteoporosis, "walking may slow age-related decline in bone density and may influence factors that preserve bone strength." Research indicates the more you walk and the faster you walk, the better off your bones and muscles will be, so get walking!

Now that we know the many, many reasons walking is good for our body and mind, it's time to get started. Beginning any exercise routine can feel overwhelming – particularly if you don't know where to start. But we're here to help! Here are nine surefire steps to help you establish an effective walking routine.

Walk it Off: 9 Steps to Get You Started

1. Make a Commitment, Establish Accountability.

Making the decision to start a healthy habit is often the hardest part. That's why your first step needs to be to commit yourself to a walking routine. Set a date to start, knowing you'll need to make some other key decisions about when, where, and how before you begin. Also consider how you'll hold yourself accountable – there are several different ways to do it. Maybe you will log your steps on an app such as MyFitnessPal or use a wearable device like a FitBit to keep track. If you're not tech-savvy, you can just as easily keep a paper log on the refrigerator.



Others may prefer to ask their friends or loved ones to hold them accountable. Do whatever works best for you, but remember that having some accountability is likely to improve the chances you'll stick to the routine.

2. Find Your Why & Define Your Success. There are so many reasons to start a walking routine, but they are different for each person. Knowing your “why” can help you determine what a successful routine looks like that is unique to you, and it's often related to what motivated you to start the routine in the first place. For some, success may be walking three times a week. For others, success might mean walking every day, losing a certain amount of weight, losing inches,

reducing specific risk factors such as blood pressure, or just feeling better overall. Without identifying your “why” and defining what a successful routine is for you, it may be difficult to make yourself keep motivated.

3. Decide Who (or What) is Going with You. For this step, you need to consider whether you prefer to walk by yourself or with others (or a combination of the two). While some need a partner to get motivated, others prefer to walk alone. For solo walkers, walking provides a great opportunity to listen to music, do self-guided meditation, listen to an audiobook, or tune into a podcast. (See #6 – Get Your Gear.)

4. Pick Your Venue. The great thing about walking is you can do it just about anywhere.

When picking your walking venue, a top consideration should always be safety. Be sure to do your homework to ensure you choose a safe location. If you're walking alone, always let someone know where and when you're going. Keep your phone with you and set your “Find My iPhone” or Android Device Manager settings to ensure your phone location can be tracked at all times. Aside from safety, decide if you prefer to walk outdoors or indoors, which may vary based on the weather or season. If you're new to walking, your local municipality's Parks & Recreation department is a great place to look for both indoor and outdoor ideas. If you prefer variety, you may want to keep

a list of options to choose from that you can switch up based on the weather or time of day.

5. It's About Time. Consider what time of day you will have the chance to walk most days, as well as how long you want to walk. Regardless of the time of day you walk, you should start your routine gradually. There are several great resources online to help you determine how many minutes to start with a day and how much to increase your duration over time. The Mayo Clinic and the American Diabetes Association both offer specific plans online for 12-week starter programs.

[Mayo Clinic 12-Week Walking Schedule](#)

[American Diabetes Association Starter Walking Plan](#)

6. Get Your Gear. While you don't really *need* anything to start a walking routine, there are a few accessories that may make your steps more enjoyable. Here is a list of items to consider:

- **Wearable fitness device** (such as a FitBit) to track your steps and keep you motivated.
- **Phone or iPod** so you can listen to music/podcast/audiobook and stay connected.
- **Earbuds** so you can tune into your programming of choice (bluetooth or wired).
- **Sports armband** to hold your phone in place while you walk.
- **Walking shoes** that fit well and make you feel great.

- **Comfortable socks** (preferably not cotton) that wick away sweat and don't irritate your feet or heels.
- **Shoe pocket** to hold your car key while you walk.
- **Water bottle** so you can stay hydrated on the go.
- **Athletic wear** that's weather appropriate and comfortable (think layers!).

7. Refine Your Routine. Once you've got a couple weeks of walking under your belt, evaluate how it's going. If you're not enjoying the process or your results, chances are you won't keep it up. Consider if it's time to make changes to any part of your routine – whether it's your gear, the venue, frequency, duration or other factor. A great way to do this is to journal your walking journey each day. Jot down the details of your walk – who, what, when, where, and how – and how much you enjoyed each walk. A ten-point scale is an easy way to track each outing. After a few weeks, look for trends and make the necessary adjustments to keep your routine enjoyable and sustainable. If you notice your early morning walks rank low, switch to a later walk time. Similarly, if your walks with a good friend rank highest, try to coordinate a regular walking schedule together.

8. Reward Yourself. If you've gotten this far in the process, you've done a GREAT job starting a walking routine. It's time to reward yourself, even if you

haven't hit every goal along the way. Find something that makes you happy and treat yourself – whether it's a favorite meal, a massage, a day at the beach, some new workout gear, or something else to recognize the efforts and commitment you've made to your health so far.

9. Keep it Up! (Remember Your Why.) When it comes to a new exercise routine, maintenance can be hard – life can easily get in the way if you let it. If you struggle with maintaining your routine, stop and remember your “why,” which is the reason (or reasons) you started a walking routine in the first place. Whether it's to reduce stress, lose weight, or improve your heart health, focusing on why you're walking is a great way to stay motivated.

Sources

[Physical Activity, Walking, and Quality of Life in Women with Depressive Symptoms](#) (*American Journal of Preventive Medicine*)

[Regular Walking Can Help Ease Depression](#) (*Scientific American*)

[Postprandial walking but not consumption of alcoholic digestifs or espresso accelerates gastric emptying in healthy volunteers](#) (*Journal of Gastrointestinal and Liver Diseases*)

[Walking and Bone Health](#) (*American Bone Health*)