

STEP TO IT!



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WALKING?

Walking improves the fitness of young and old and promotes social interaction between families and other walking companions. It brings people closer to nature, providing them with opportunities to observe and understand the environment around them. Regular walking has many positive health benefits.

It can improve your:

- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Stamina
- ✓ Energy
- ✓ Concentration and alertness
- ✓ Weight Control
- ✓ Life expectancy

It can reduce the risk of:

- ✓ Coronary heart disease
- ✓ Strokes
- ✓ Diabetes
- ✓ High blood pressure
- ✓ Bowel Cancer
- ✓ Alzheimer's disease
- ✓ Osteoporosis
- ✓ Arthritis
- ✓ Anxiety
- ✓ Stress
- ✓ Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)



Much of the information presented below is sourced directly from the 'Walking the Way to Health Initiative' (see 'Further Information').

WHY WALK IN GREEN SPACES?

Private gardens, railway embankments, allotments, sports grounds, parks, recreation grounds or farmland make up 'green space'. Whichever of these views you are able to enjoy, the 'greenery' can benefit you! Growing medical evidence shows that access to the natural, 'green' environment significantly improves health and wellbeing, prevents disease and helps people recover from illness.

Some people think that a rise in mental health problems may have come about from our urban lifestyle and our 'disconnection' with nature. With 80% of people in the UK living in urban areas, it is important to make the effort to access green space such as that in the Beck Corridor.

One in every four GP consultations relates to depression, anxiety, stress and other mental health conditions. Stress has an adverse effect on health by affecting the immune system and decreasing resistance to

illness. The mental health gains that come with physical activity should not be underestimated. It can improve the ability to cope with stressful situations and enhance concentration and work output.

Natural environments provide opportunities to:

- be physically active in the outdoors
 - which benefits both physical and mental strength
- reduce stress and address mental health issues
 - through soothing contact with nature, which has a restorative effect
- socialise outdoors with friends, family and new people to reduce isolation and loneliness
 - people with good social networks enjoy better mental health.

HOW ACTIVE ARE YOU?

Are you 'sedentary'? – undertake less than one session of 30 minutes continuous moderate intensity physical activity a week.

Are you 'irregular moderate'? – undertake at least one session of 30 minutes or more moderate intensity activity a week, but less than 5 sessions a week.

Are you 'moderate'? – undertake a minimum of 30 minutes moderate intensity activity on 5 days a week.

Are you 'regular vigorous'? – undertake at least 3 sessions lasting at least 20 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity a week

(Categories presented in Health Update 5: Physical Activity, Health Education Authority, 1995a)

Would you like to change your level of activity?

Few people are now active at work with only 20% of men and 10% of women in an occupation that requires moderately vigorous exercise. 40% of people blame lack of time for not being more active. An increase in labour-saving devices around the home and an increase in inactive pastimes involving television, video games and computers hasn't helped matters! Physical inactivity and obesity are major public health challenges. Walking may well be a prescription that suits the majority!





If you class yourself as 'sedentary' – you're not the only one! Seven out of ten people do not take enough exercise to benefit their health as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer. Being sedentary, it's likely that you'll see walking as a more realistic change in your lifestyle than the type of exercise usually associated with 'sporty types'! The level of strain to feet and joints is minimal and brisk walking could help you reach at least a moderate level of fitness! Adults who become more active also halve their risk of dying early from heart disease!

Building a Habit of Regular Walking

Green exercise includes walking, cycling and conservation activities, but also extends to any activity that takes place in the natural environment – from informal play and games on local greenspace, to orienteering in national forests and parks. How can you build regular, moderate physical activity out of doors into your daily life and so lead a less sedentary life?

Your aim should be to try and walk on most days of the week! You could start with a 10-minute walk and gradually increase the time you spend walking. If you are very unfit you may want to start by walking every other day. If you need to take a rest, do. To get health benefits from walking, you only need to walk for 30 minutes, five days a week. Three sessions of 10 minutes walking in a day is just as good. Start by walking on flat ground and by going a short distance. Increase the distance you walk before you increase the speed or gradient.



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▷ Setting the Pace

Any walking is better than none! Brisk walking is the best but if you are unfit or have taken very little exercise recently, gentle strolling is a good start. Avoid overdoing things at first; it is much better to start slowly and build up to walking fast.

Brisk walking is the goal because the heart reaches its natural 'training zone', when it has to work a little harder than normal. You are walking briskly when: your heart beats faster than normal but is not racing; your breathing is deeper than usual but conversation is still possible; you experience a warm glowing feeling.

The right walking speed for you depends on your gender, age and fitness. The table below shows target speeds for people who want to be fit. For example, if you are a woman aged 57 who is managing to walk briskly, slightly out of breath, at a speed of 3 miles per hour, then you are fit. These speeds are based on flat ground; if there are gradients on your walk then increase the time by 10% to 20%.



MEN mph	WOMEN mph	AGE UP TO 39 yrs	AGE 40-54 yrs	AGE 55-64 yrs	AGE 65-74 yrs	AGE 75 and over
5.0	4.5	Fit	Very fit	Very fit	Very fit	Wow
4.5	4.0	Fit	Fit	Very fit	Very fit	Very fit
4.0	3.5	Fit	Fit	Very fit	Very fit	Very fit
3.5	3.0	Unfit	Just fit	Fit	Fit	Fit
3.0	2.5	Unfit	Unfit	Just fit	Just fit	Fit
2.5	2.0	Unfit	Unfit	Unfit	Just fit	Just fit



Calorie Counting

A quarter of adults are obese and it is predicted that this will increase to half of adults being morbidly obese by 2010 (2008 news reports). Though the benefits of walking go far beyond just 'burning off calories', the following information may be of help to some.

The average adult male's guideline daily amount is 2500 kcal. The average adult female's guideline daily amount is 2000 kcal.

For adults, walking can burn off somewhere in the region of 75-150 kcal per half hour, depending in part on weight and the briskness of the walk. Check out the internet for personalised estimates (eg. www.healthyweightforum.org).

To make a habit of regular walking, you could try this

10-WEEK PLAN:

Starting off:

Week 1 – two walks of 10 minutes each on three days of the week

Weeks 2 and 3 – two walks of 15 minutes each on four days of the week

Week 4 – two walks of 15 minutes each on five days of the week

Getting going:

Week 5 to 9 – two walks of 15 minutes each, or one walk of 30 minutes, on five days of the week. Try to increase your pace slightly or include a route which has some inclines or uphill slopes.

Staying with it:

Week 10 onwards – aim for a brisk pace and challenge yourself with steeper inclines or hills.

If you find any week difficult then repeat the week and stay at that level until you are able to progress comfortably. If, from week 5 onwards, you cannot fit a 30-minute continuous walk into your day then break the sessions down into smaller units.

To help motivate yourself to walk:

- Vary where you walk to keep it interesting
- Leave your walking shoes by the door to remind you or, better still, establish a routine
- Keep a note of when and how far you walk
- Walk with a friend or walking group
- Remind yourself how your fitness has improved
- Join in with guided walks or make use of published walk trails.



Health Concerns for Young People

Recent estimates suggest that around 40% of school age children are overweight. Obesity levels for children aged six have doubled since the mid-1990's and have tripled in 15-year-olds. Perhaps 1 in 4 children will be clinically obese by 2010 (2008 news reports). Few health problems are observed in obese children. However, later in life individuals may develop high blood pressure, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Memory problems, headaches and fatigue may arise from 'sleep apnoea'.

Both genes and the environment play a role in weight gain. However, in modern times the following factors are likely to be instrumental. People are much less active nowadays; fatty and sugary foods are more accessible; the average portion sizes have become larger; the calories per mouthful have increased.

Estimated average per-day energy requirements for children are as follows:

1-3 years	1230 kcal for boys	1165 kcal for girls
4-6 years	1715 kcal for boys	1545 kcal for girls
7-10 years	1970 kcal for boys	1740 kcal for girls
11-14 years	2220 kcal for boys	1845 kcal for girls
15-18 years	2755 kcal for boys	2110 kcal for girls

(Source: The Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy, 1991)



Childhood eating habits can determine adult food tastes and the body's metabolic rate. Five portions of fruit or vegetables a day are now advocated to improve nutrition, but energy balance is also key – young people are eating too much for the amount of physical activity they undertake. It is recommended that children participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity on all seven days of the week. At least twice a week this should include activities to improve bone health, muscle strength and flexibility. Studies suggest that there is more scope to increase children's activity levels (and decrease their levels of obesity) by encouraging more outside play in greenspace than there is in encouraging formal sport. Regular access to the natural environment is important for improving concentration and behaviour too.

(Source: 'Preventing Childhood Obesity', Board of Science, June 2005).

There's no easier exercise to participate in than walking! Using a pedometer or monitoring walking achievement on a chart may help encourage young people to think about how far and how often they walk!