

Fitness Walking Technique

Posture

How you hold your body is important to walking comfortably and easily. With good posture, you will be able to breathe easier and you will avoid back pain.

- Stand up straight.
- Think of being a tall and straight. Do not arch your back.
- Do not lean forward or lean back. Leaning puts strain on the back muscles.
- Eyes forward, not looking down, rather 20 feet ahead.
- Chin up (parallel to the ground). This reduces strain on neck and back.
- Shrug once and let your shoulders fall and relax, your shoulders slightly back.
- Suck in your stomach.
- Tuck in your behind and rotate your hip forward slightly. This will keep you from arching your back.

Arms

Arm motion can lend power to your walking, burning 5-10% more calories and acting as a balance to your leg motion.

- Bend your elbow 90 degrees.
- Hands should be loose in a partially closed curl, never clenched.
- Clenching your fists can raise your blood pressure and should be avoided.
- With each step, the arm opposite your forward foot comes straight forward, not diagonally.
- As the foot goes back, the opposite arm comes straight back.
- Keep your elbows close to your body - don't "chicken wing."
- Your forward hand should not cross the center point of your body.
- Your hand when coming forward should be kept low, not higher than your breastbone.
- Many poor examples of arm motion are seen with walkers pumping their arms up high in the air, this does not help propel you.
- If you find adding arm motion tiring, do it for 5 to 10 minutes at a time and then let your arms rest.

The Walking Step

The walking step is a rolling motion.

- Strike the ground first with your heel.
- Roll through the step from heel to toe.
- Push off with your toe.
- Bring the back leg forward to strike again with the heel.
- Flexible shoes will ensure you are able to roll through the step.
- If your feet are slapping down rather than rolling through, your shoes are likely too stiff.
- At first, your shin muscles may tire and be sore until they are strengthened.

Stride

- Take more, smaller steps rather than lengthening your stride to increase speed. Avoid overstriding - taking longer steps to increase speed.
- Your back leg is propelling you forward, while your forward leg has little to no power. Getting the full power out of the push from the back leg as it rolls from heel to toe is the key to powerful, efficient walking.
- Your stride should be longer behind you, where your toe is pushing off, not in front of your body.

Fitness Walking Program

Fitness walking is an excellent way to tone muscles and burn calories. In fact, you can burn almost as many calories with a vigorous walk as you can running, and fitness walking is much less stressful on the body.

GETTING STARTED – YOUR WARM UP

- Warm up your muscles with some light full body stretches
- Start out at a slow, easy pace or the first few minutes of your walk to prepare your body for the activity
- Make sure your muscles are warm before you, add speed or hills

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YOUR WALK

- After warming up, pick up the pace to a moderate level for three minutes
- Your exertion should rate about 5 on a scale of 1 (little exertion) to 10 (maximum exertion)
- You can then gradually increase your exertion to a rate of 6-7 and continue walking
- If you'd like to increase your endurance and weight loss, consider adding some short intervals where you speed up to about 8 or 9 on your exertion scale for 30 -60 seconds, then drop back to your regular pace (6-7). Repeat as many times as you can
- When you are nearing the end of your walk, return to a moderate pace of 5-6 on the scale.
- Leave at least 10 minutes for your cool down and stretches

COOL DOWN

- As you approach the final few minutes of your walk, gradually decrease your speed to begin your cool down phase
- When you finish walking, take time to stretch, with emphasis on leg stretches.

STRETCHING

- Now it's time to stretch the muscles you have worked during your walk to maintain flexibility and reduce the potential for soreness later
- Find an upright pole, fence or wall that will support you for some stretches
- See suggested stretches on separate page

Stretches and Mobility Exercises for Walkers

Head Circles: Make 1/4 circles with your head. Start with your ear near your shoulder on one side, rotate your head around to the front, ending with your ear near the shoulder on the other side. Roll your head back to the other side. Repeat 5-10 times.

Arm Circles: With one arm at a time, make backwards arm circle with your palm facing out, thumb pointed up. Repeat 10-15 with each arm. Then make forward arm circles with palm facing in, thumb pointed down, repeat 10-15 times.

Hip Stretch: Stand up, take a half-step back with the right foot. Bend your left knee and shift your weight back to your right hip. While keeping the right leg straight, bend forward more and reach further down your right leg. Hold for 15-30 seconds. Switch sides.

Quadriceps Stretch:
Stand erect, holding onto a wall for support.
Bend your knee behind you so that you can grasp your foot, holding your heel against your butt.
Stand up straight and push your knee gently back as far as you can, the hand just keeps the heel in place.
(For some, it is more comfortable to use the hand from the opposite side).
Hold for 15-30 seconds, then switch.

Calf Stretch: Stand an arm's-length from the wall/post.
Lean into wall/post, bracing yourself with your arms.
Place one leg forward with knee bent - this leg will have no weight put on it.
Keep other leg back with knee straight and heel down.
Keeping back straight, move hips toward wall until you feel a stretch.
Hold 30 seconds. Relax.
Repeat with other leg.

Soleus Calf Stretch: From the calf stretch position, bend the back knee so that the angle is changed to stretch the Achilles tendon. Keep your heel down, hold 15-30 seconds. Then switch legs.

Leg Extensions: Facing the pole, hold on with both hands. Bending at the knee, bring one leg forward, then extend and swing that leg back and behind. Repeat 10-15 times, then switch legs. Be cautious of hyperextending your lower back.

Cross Over Leg Swings: Holding onto the pole or fence rail with both hands, face forward. Swing one leg in front of your body gradually swinging higher. Swing about 10-15 times with each leg.

Quad Foam Roll : Lie on your front and place the foam roller under one thigh, bending the other leg away from the roller. Let your weight settle on your forearms and slowly move your body weight along your quad, holding on any sore places. Be sure to stop rolling before you get to your knee joint!