

Fitness Walking – The #1 Exercise for Life

Introduction

- **Walking is the top exercise activity in the United States.** It beats anything else by a factor of 5.
- **Medical research shows that walking an hour a day reduces your risk of breast cancer, colon cancer, heart disease and diabetes by 30 percent to 50 percent.** If you had a vitamin or drug that did that, people would be beating down the doors of the Food and Drug Administration to have it fortified into milk, bread and beer.
- **Race Walking**, the athletic event, exercises more muscles and burns more calories than running or regular walking per mile. It **is an excellent workout.**

Inactivity is the biggest killer today. Heart disease and diabetes could be reduced by 50% if people would take up fitness walking. Yes, exercise is medicine. *There is no cure for all the ills associated with lack of exercise.*
www.CharitiesChallenge.org

Fitness Walking

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Fitness walking is distinguished from walking by its fitness aspect.

Most of us walk. We've walked since we were toddlers. We've walked all our lives.

But, **most of us are unfit or low-fit. Because of our lack of fitness, we're also unhealthy;** we experience substantially increased incidence of disease and premature death. Plus, **we just aren't "fit" for enjoying life as much as we would be if we were fit.** We're not having as much pleasure as we will when we're feeling better because we are better.

So, what is "fitness" walking?

Fitness walking is simply walking at a fast enough pace, and sustained for a sufficient duration of time, to result in a fitness benefit. Walking for fitness. It's not a stroll. For the unfit this may be walking just a little bit faster than normal and for as few as five minutes. If you're breathing deeply, but not gasping for air (that's too fast!), and perspiring, then you're fitness walking. Eventually, some of us will be able to sustain a fitness walk pace for hours at a time. How? Because we've become fit for the challenge.

So, how do we change some of our walking into fitness walking?

In order for fitness walking to result in increased fitness we have to do something beyond what we normally do. **Over time, we're going to increase our pace/speed. And, in time we're going to increase the time that we fitness walk.**

To increase pace or speed merely take quicker steps. Increase the number of steps you're taking per minute. This is called your strike rate. Don't try and take an unusually longer step; just a quicker turn over of your foot steps. This will result in a faster pace/speed and demand a higher energy expenditure and caloric expenditure.

To increase the duration of your fitness walk, merely add a few minutes to your usual fitness walking time. Generally, don't increase your total time walking per week by more than about 10% beyond what you fitness walked the week before. And, don't increase the duration of your longest fitness walk by more than 10% beyond your previous longest fitness walk.

In order to fitness walk efficiently and smoothly, **make the following subtle adjustments to your normal walking gait:**

1. **Keep your arms bent at the elbow at 90 degrees**, and let this shortened arm length allow you to take quicker steps. It's the principle that a short pendulum swings more quickly than a long pendulum. If your arms are extended then your feet will have to move more slowly, too.
2. **Lift your toes**, advancing your heel forward with each advancing step.
3. Roll slowly and steadily through your entire foot to a **toe off behind you** as you push yourself forward.
4. **Resist overstriding.** Too long a stride length will create a braking action and actually slow you down.
5. **Relax, relax, relax.**
6. **Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.**
7. **Invite a friend to fitness walk with you.**

One day you may even want to enter a roadrace, a 5k or 10k (3.1 or 6.2 miles). One day you may even want to join me in fitness walking a marathon (26.2 miles). Really! I've coached and seen hundreds of formerly unfit and low-fit people celebrating life by enjoying their new fitness level by happily fitness walking marathons.

"All great masters are chiefly distinguished by the power of adding a second, a third, and perhaps a fourth step in a continuous line. Many a man had taken the first step. With every additional step you enhance immensely the value of your first." Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)