

Walking Workout!

Walking is an easy and convenient fitness option. It can be done just about anywhere by anyone, and it doesn't require special equipment or sport specific skills. A comfortable pair of walking shoes, a water bottle and a willingness to get out there and do it is all that is needed. But for walking to get you fit or keep you fit, it does need to be done for a certain period of time and with a certain amount of purpose and intensity. Walking for fitness is not the same as strolling.

For walking to be an effective fitness activity it needs to be done for 30-60 minutes, 3-5 times a week. It also needs to be done at a brisk pace. Brisk means at a pace where you are puffing but you can still hold a conversation. Or to be more specific, you need to be working hard enough to be unable to sing but not so hard that you can only converse with single words. For those who like statistics and heart rate monitors, brisk means walking about 6kms per hour or at a rate of 70-80% of your maximum heart rate.

Walking can be made more interesting and varied by changing where and when you when walk. Walking in different places and at different times of the day can make each walk look and feel completely different. Mixing your walks up like this will help keep you motivated and keen to walk regularly.

The fitness benefit of walking can also easily be enhanced. Try making these adjustments to get more out of your walking:

- Increase your speed – do this by increasing the number of steps you take rather than by lengthening your stride. This will elevate your heart rate without adding any strain to your legs or feet.
- Use your arms – bend your elbows at a 90 degree angle and pump them back and forth as you step. This will help you walk faster as well as burn more calories.
- Narrow your stride – instead of stepping with your feet a shoulder width apart imagine that you are trying to walk down a line (but not a tightrope!) so that your feet follow each other more directly. This will increase your energy output as well as make your large muscle groups work harder.
- Add some fast/slow intervals to your walks – deliberately include some faster walking for 5-10minutes at time and then revert to a comfortable brisk pace. You can do this 2-3 times within at 40–60 minute walk.
- Walk up and down hills – adding inclines adds intensity. This will elevate your heart rate and increase your muscle strength.

- Vary the terrain – walking on grass or gravel involves more effort and will burn more calories than walking on a flat, smooth path. And walking in soft sand can burn almost double the calories.
- Add some arm work to your walk by carrying light handweights – just make sure they are light. They should only weigh 5%-10% of your bodyweight.

If walking is your preferred fitness activity then make sure it counts – walk briskly, walk often, and include 1-2 of the fitness enhancements listed above to each walk.

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