

WALKING YOUR WAY TO BETTER HEALTH

Contributed by Mandy Enright, MS, RDN, RYT

Working from home may mean you're sitting a bit more during the workdays. When we're working from home, we have fewer reasons to stand up and move around which can result in more time sitting. In fact, the phrase "sitting is the new smoking" originated as a cautionary tale that sedentary behavior can have a significant negative impact on our health.

It is recommended to get 30 minutes of movement a day, and it doesn't even have to be all at one time. Walking is the most popular form of physical activity and with good reason – it's the most accessible form of movement that most people can do at any age. While you may picture exercise as only involving breaking a serious sweat, don't underestimate the power of walking for our overall health.

Benefits of Walking

Physical Health Benefits

- Can help manage and maintain weight
- Reduces the risk of heart disease and certain cancers, lowers cholesterol, manages blood sugar, and eases joint pain
- Stimulates digestive system
- Helps boost immunity
- Tones leg muscles
- Increases metabolism
- Facilitates better sleep
- May help increase your life span

Mental Health Benefits

- Relieves stress
- Provides a brain break to clear the mind, solve problems, stimulate creativity, and reset focus
- Boosts energy and mood
- Promotes bonding time with family, friends, or pets
- May help curb cravings and stress eating
- Increases mindfulness

Keep in mind that if your goal is to lose weight, you should aim to change up your walking habits to increase your heart rate and promote a greater energy burn including:

- Walking longer distances
- Walking faster
- Changing the incline by walking uphill or downhill, including using stairs
- Walking on different terrains such as sand, dirt, or grass
- Adding resistance, such as using light weights

How to Get More Walking in Your Day

There are many ways to get more steps in your day. Sometimes you just need to use a little creativity!

- Use headphones or earbuds to allow more mobility while on calls and in meetings
- Invite a co-worker for a walking meeting – even if it's virtual.
- Place items like trash cans or printers away from your workspace so you have to walk further to use them.
- Use the bathroom furthest away from your workspace or if there is only one bathroom, consider taking a few extra laps around before sitting back down.
- Use the stairs instead of elevators and park farther away from your workspace. If you commute to work using public transportation, consider exiting a stop or two earlier so you get extra walking time.
- Take a walk instead of an afternoon coffee break.





- Explore your local community by foot – visit local parks, hiking trails, or simply take your own walking tour.
- Take a family walk or make plans to walk with a friend, neighbor, colleague, or pet daily.
- Check out indoor walking options for bad weather days such as shopping centers.
- Block time in your calendar for walking breaks and set reminders as needed.

Track Your Progress

There are many ways to track your walking progress. Many people like to count their steps, but you can also measure time and distances. Some favorite tracking methods include:

- Wearable devices, smartwatches, pedometers, or heart rate monitors
- Apps such as your phone's health or fitness app; or track your route, time, and speed using MapMyFitness
- Keep a log using a calendar or journal to track when you walk and for how long

Getting Started: Your 4-Week Walking Plan

First and foremost, make sure you have a comfortable pair of shoes. Good walking shoes should provide adequate cushioning, foot and ankle support, stability, and not be too loose or tight.

Start small! Going for shorter walks more frequently will increase your total walking time and help to build up stamina for longer or more intense walks and workouts.

Set goals and use a non-food reward each time you hit that goal to promote consistency and stay motivated. Set a daily and weekly goal as you use the following program to help you create a habit out of walking:

Week 1: Take a 15-minute walk at an easy pace for 5 days. Plan some rest days in between, such as Wednesday and Sunday (weekly goal: 60-75 minutes)

Week 2: Increase to 20 minutes of walking a day for 5 days, adding in rest days (weekly goal: 80-100 minutes)

Week 3: Increase to 25 minutes a day for 5 days a week (weekly goal: 100-125 minutes)

Week 4: Increase to 30 minutes a day for 5 days a week (weekly goal: 120-150 minutes)

TIP! If you found any weeks to be challenging, repeat that week instead of adding more time.

How About Some Friendly Competition?

Want to increase your accountability and make walking even more fun? Consider doing a walking challenge with your colleagues to add some friendly competition into the mix. Visit <https://www.well-concepts.com/strive#walking-challenges> to learn more about our corporate walking challenges.



Mandy Enright MS, RDN, RYT, is a Registered Dietitian, Yoga Instructor, and Corporate Wellness Expert, as well as main content contributor for Wellness Concepts. Mandy is a featured presenter, both virtually and onsite near her home in Neptune, NJ.

