



Walking

30 minutes of moderate physical exercise five times a week are the recommended levels for a healthy lifestyle

You can achieve a healthy lifestyle using simple steps such as using the stairs instead of the lift, walking to the shops, taking a walk with your family, briskly walking the dog or altering your daily routine to include some keep-fit time.

Why do it?

Increasing your body's activity levels will improve your internal systems, making for a fitter and more efficient you. One of the simplest forms of exercise which most people can do is walking.

Walking:

- Helps to promote a healthy heart - the heart is a muscle and the more it is used the stronger it gets
- Can help to lower cholesterol and blood pressure levels which subsequently can reduce your chances of getting Type 2 diabetes and cancer

- Helps to maintain a healthy weight
- Is kinder to the environment than driving
- Can help you to de-stress and improve your mood
- Doesn't need any special equipment
- Doesn't cost anything.

Facts about walking

- Walking just 1 mile burns over 100 calories
- About a third of all the journeys we make are less than a mile. A mile is only about a 20 minute walk
- The average person could save £160 every year by walking instead of driving the journey to school – just think what fun you could have with that extra money.

Preparation and getting started

It's important to prepare for walking by taking time to ensure you:

- Stay hydrated
- Are aware of how to treat blisters and chafing

- Take appropriate breaks
- Make sure you're wearing comfortable clothes: a few thin layers of clothing are better than one thick layer, so you can take off layers as you warm up, or add them if you get cold
- Your shoes must fit properly to avoid blisters. Too snug or too loose is always a problem. Ensure that there is ½ inch space between your longest toe and the end of your shoe. Be sure that you have enough room to wiggle your toes inside the toe box, and that your heel does not slip when you walk. Choose shoes that breathe well. Inspect the inside of your shoes for seams or worn areas that might produce extra friction.
- Select socks that fit your foot without being too tight or too loose. Choose soft wicking fabric such as coolmax, not cotton. Cotton absorbs moisture and is usually a little rough in texture. Ensure that the socks do not have bulky stitching at the toes or heels. Some people choose to wear two layers of socks

(or a sock that is made with double layers) to aid in blister prevention. Do not wear socks that are too worn, thin areas and holes are very likely to produce hot spots and blisters. Do not wear untested socks on a long walk and never wear unwashed socks. When walking distances carry a spare pair of socks. Change during your walk if your feet become sweaty or wet. (Tip: dust the inside of your spare socks with talcum powder and place in a zip lock bag inside your backpack)

- Unless you're sure it's not going to rain, take a jacket – it's easier than holding an umbrella.
- A hat can keep you warm in winter and protect you from the sun in summer
- Wear gloves if it's cold – it's difficult to walk briskly with your hands in your pockets
- Take some water and some food too if you're going on a longer walk and take regular breaks
- A small backpack is more comfortable to walk with, and is better for your back than an ordinary bag.

Top tips

Top tips to make sure your walks are as comfortable and easy as possible:

- Stand up straight but relaxed and look ahead
- Breathe deeply and in rhythm with your steps if you can
- Try to swing your arms in time with your stride.

Staying safe

Some people are put off walking because they're worried about being safe, but by taking a few precautions we can all feel safe while we walk:

- Choose routes that are well-used and well-lit if you walk at night
- Know where you're going – if you don't know the area well, take a map or leaflet
- Be prepared to change your route if you feel unsafe for any reason
- Take a travel pass or some change in case you need to use public transport
- Take a mobile phone and/or tell someone where you've gone if you're going on a long walk
- If you're wearing headphones, make sure you can hear traffic and are aware of everything that's going on around you
- Take care on busy roads and road crossings, and paths used by cyclists.

You may find the following websites useful

<http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/getting-started-guides/pages/getting-started-walking.aspx>

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk>