

WALK YOUR WAY TO A HEALTHY HEART

Think you're too unwell or unfit to exercise? Then simply start small. Walking opens the door to better heart health.

You've probably heard the recommended physical activity guidelines for adults before, but where do you start if you're not up to exercising for 30 minutes a day, five times a week? According to Prof Ulf Ekelund from the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, all you need to transform health is brisk walking (BBC News).

Remember, your heart is a muscle and physical activity helps make it stronger. Exercise can reduce stress, give you more energy, help you sleep better and bring down your risk of heart disease.

WALK BEFORE YOU RUN

Walking is free and you don't need any special equipment besides well-fitting shoes. If you can, try brisk walking. A great way to check if you're walking at the correct intensity is the talk test. If you can talk (slightly out of breath) while working out, but you can't sing or whistle, you're exercising at the right level.

6 STEPS TO GET YOU STARTED

- #1** Find a safe place to walk: Start by walking up and down corridors, on a treadmill or go to a park or school field. Botanical gardens are usually safe and have clean restrooms. Rope in a walking buddy so you have someone to remind you to walk and keep you company.
- #2** Warm up: Even if you start with a gentle stroll, warming up is a good exercise habit that helps prevent muscle injury. Start slowly and add some light dynamic stretching (stretch while moving slowly). Gradually up your pace.
- #3** Listen to your body: Only do as much as you can. Walking is not about pushing your limits. Stop when you're tired. If you're fit, you can walk until you're uncomfortably tired.
- #4** If you limp or your steps are uneven, slow down: You're walking to get your heart pumping and body comfortable with exercise, not training to run a marathon.
- #5** Once you're walking comfortably, pull in your stomach: Just like walking can get you fit enough to start new exercises, walking while pulling in your stomach is the first step to strengthening your core muscles.
- #6** Cool down: The last phase of any exercise session is always letting your body recover for a few minutes and having your heart gradually return to its resting rate. A cool down includes slowly decreasing the intensity of your physical activity and stretching.

Stop right away and see your doctor if you have any of the following symptoms while exercising:

- Chest pain, ache in jaw or neck, discomfort down the arms, pain across the shoulder or back
- Unusual shortness of breath
- Sudden cold or light-headedness (dizziness)
- A noticeably rapid, strong, or irregular heartbeat.

If you're new to exercising or have a chronic condition, stop if anything hurts (it takes a while to learn the difference between stiffness and straining your muscles), or if you feel nauseated.

WHEN TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE YOU START EXERCISING

Walking is a safe exercise for most people. But if you have a medical condition or haven't exercised for a while, you shouldn't rush into exercising in an effort to get fit. Speak to your doctor before starting if you:

- Recently had surgery
- Have poor balance or fall often
- Feel dizzy when you walk or take medicine that makes you sleepy or dizzy
- Have ongoing health problems like heart disease (or are at risk of developing heart disease), or have trouble breathing, high blood pressure, osteoporosis or diabetes

GO WHERE YOUR FEET TAKE YOU

Plan your exercise programme so you can get the most benefit out of it for your blood pressure without adding stress on your heart. Knowing your limits and capabilities is essential for a sustainable exercise routine.

When you can keep walking without becoming tired, you can start thinking of yourself as walking fit. You can even start exploring other kinds of exercise like jogging, dancing or cycling. So go where your feet take you, and start your walk to a healthier heart today!

- All you need to transform your health is brisk walking.
- If you can talk (slightly out of breath) while working out, but you can't sing or whistle, you're exercising at the correct level.
- Knowing your limits and capabilities is essential for a sustainable exercise routine.

CHAT TO HEALTHY COMPANY FOR FREE ADVICE

Healthy Company is here for you. Contact us through the Discovery app, www.discovery.co.za or 0800 320 420

