

Walking tips

Walking is an excellent form of exercise for people of all ages and abilities. Start your walking program gradually, increasing length and pace as you get used to it. The following suggestions may help you to incorporate regular walking into your lifestyle.

General walking tips

If you have not walked distances for some time, you should start slowly. Increase the length and pace of your walk gradually. Here are some tips on how to get started and how to prepare for walking.

- Warm-up activity – start slowly, do a few warm-up exercises and stretches first. Don't walk immediately after a big meal.
- Build activity slowly – start with a 20 minute walk then increase gradually. Try to walk at least three times per week.
- Use the correct technique – walk at a steady pace, swing your arms freely and stand as straight as you can. Your feet should step in a rolling action from the heel to the toe.
- Shoes and socks – wear thick comfortable cotton socks. Sensible, comfortable and lightweight shoes with support are best.
- Weather – wear suitable warm, light clothing in the winter and cool, comfortable clothes in the summer. Don't forget your sunscreen and hat.
- Water – drink water before and after your walk. Take water with you on your walk, especially in warm weather.
- Cool down – make sure you cool down after a long fast walk. Do a few stretching exercises.

Children

Statistics show that Australian children are living increasingly sedentary lives. Suggestions on encouraging your child to enjoy regular walks include:

- If your child finds television and computer games more interesting than exercise, consider getting them a dog. Your child's desire to love and care for the animal may encourage them to take it on regular walks. Remember, though, that dogs aren't permitted in most national parks and other conservation reserves.
- Boost your child's interest in outdoor activities by visiting scenic areas and organising fun activities, such as sailing or camping for the weekend.
- Encourage your child's interest in nature through books and websites, then follow-up with 'field trips' so they can discover their favourite animals or plants for themselves (and enjoy the health benefits of walking at the same time).
- Schedule a regular family walk – this is a great way to pass on healthy habits to your children and spend time together, while getting fit at the same time.
- When walking with children, make sure the route and length of time spent walking is appropriate to their age. Approximately 1km per birthday is a good rule of thumb. For example, a four year old can be expected to walk up to 4km, with plenty of rest breaks.
- Start good habits early. Take young babies and toddlers for walks in their pram. As they get older, encourage them to walk part of the way.
- Look for self-guided nature walks, which have been set up in many parks. Younger children enjoy looking for the next numbered post; older ones can learn about the plants and animals of the park, and perhaps take photos or record their experience in other ways.

Seniors

- Regular weight-bearing exercise can improve cardiovascular fitness and bone strength, reduce excess body fat and boost muscle power. Walking is an excellent form of exercise for the elderly, since it is low impact, free and high in health benefits. Suggestions include:
- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are overweight, haven't exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.
- Consider joining a walking club specific to your needs and age group.
- Consider starting up a walking club of your own with friends and neighbours.

People with disabilities

- People with disabilities will also benefit from regular exercise. Suggestions include:
- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program.
- An able-bodied person can help someone with a disability to better enjoy their neighbourhood walk or bush walk. For example, a sighted companion can warn a vision-impaired person of upcoming obstacles.
- National parks allow guide dogs, although domestic dogs, cats and other pets are strictly forbidden.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local council

Things to remember

- Walking is an excellent form of exercise for people of all ages and abilities.
- Prepare for a walk by warming up, wearing the correct clothing and shoes, and making sure that you are well hydrated. Warm down after a walk.
- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are obese, haven't exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.