

# Walk Your Way to Better Health

If someone told you there is a way to exercise that doesn't require a pricey gym membership or athletic skill and is actually relaxing, what would you say? No doubt, the answer would be: "Sign me up!"

Walking is the most popular form of exercise, but may be taken for granted since it is an act that many of us do each day without considering it an aerobic activity. However, the results of walking are physically rewarding — leading to a trimmer body and enhanced general health.

One of the wonderful aspects of starting a walking routine, known as exercise-walking, is that it can be done almost anywhere and at any time, regardless of the weather. You can walk to the store, in a mall, around your neighborhood, with your dog, with a group of friends or on your own. In addition, it is a great form of exercise for those who have a long history of inactivity, problems with obesity or who simply don't like strenuous activity.

Before you get started on your new walking routine, the American Podiatric Medical Association recommends finding sensible, comfortable walking shoes to ensure proper foot health. Wear thick, absorbent socks and footwear that is stable from side to side and well-cushioned. Since buying shoes is the only real monetary investment you need to make for your walking regimen, don't try to cut costs. Buy your shoes for quality, comfort and fit.

If you are free of any serious health problems, then your walking routine is ready to hit the road immediately. The APMA suggests a checkup if you are over the age of 60, have a disease, disability or are taking medication. A medical exam is also recommended if you are 35 to 60, substantially overweight, easily fatigued, an excessive smoker or physically inactive.

The APMA has a few tips for getting started: Begin by taking 20 minute walks, moving at your own pace but brisk enough to make your heart beat faster. Walk with your head and back straight and stomach tight, keeping your legs out front and knees slightly bent. As you're walking, try to land on the heel of your foot and roll forward to push off on the ball of your foot. Don't forget to cool down by stretching at the end of each session.

For more advice on starting a walking program and a list of shoes that have the APMA Seal of Acceptance, log on to [www.apma.org](http://www.apma.org).

