



Why Walking Works

The human body is designed to walk. What better way to spend a sunny afternoon than to get outdoors, getting an aerobic workout, increasing our heart rate, increasing circulation, strengthening the heart muscle, filling our lungs with fresh air and reaping the benefits of all that oxygen? A little rain never hurt anyone either. What has really hurt many heart disease sufferers—and people with heart disease risk factors—is a sedentary lifestyle.

The benefits of walking for the heart are numerous. Moderate physical activity, including walking, cycling, and light gardening, for 30 minutes a day cuts the risk of heart disease mortality. Even 45 minutes of exercise three times a week can reduce cardiovascular risks, depression, and emotional stress better than conventional care alone.

Best of all, it is never too late to get strolling. A 2006 study in *Heart* reported that couch potatoes who only started exercising later in life still cut their chances of developing [heart disease](#) significantly. People aged 40-plus who got off that couch and

got active lowered their risk by 55 percent compared to the still inactive. People who had been active and stayed active enjoyed a 60 percent drop in risk for coronary heart disease. In 2006, researchers also reviewed all the current literature on walking for the prevention of heart disease and its risk factors. They noted in the *Journal of Women's Health* that walking cuts a woman's risk and has beneficial effects on risk factors such as obesity, abnormal cholesterol and triglyceride levels, hypertension, and diabetes.

Physical benefits of walking:

- Decreased chances of breast cancer
- Decreased chances of prostate cancer
- Helps to improve lower back pain
- Can improve [bone density](#)
- Increased calories burned help to maintain a healthy weight
- Can reduce the activity of genes that promote obesity
- Improves function of the [immune system](#)
- Can help to reduce pain in joints
- Helps to keep [blood sugar levels](#) balanced

Mental benefits of walking:

- Helps to reduce stress
- Improves mood
- Helps to increase creativity
- Improves sleep

Easy Walking Tips

- Listen to music while walking, which will add to the mental health benefits
- Listen to podcasts or an audio book
- Join a walking group. Starting and sticking to a fitness routine is easier if you are not alone.
- Walk during work. Skip the coffee break and head outside for 15 minutes of fresh air. The amount of cardiovascular exercise you do over a day adds up. You do not have to do 45 minutes in one session. Every 15 minutes counts.
- In bad weather, walk in a nearby shopping mall.
- Buy a pedometer. Set an initial, reasonable goal for yourself, eg. 2,500 steps a day,

and increase it as you achieve it.

- Schedule walks. Write them into your day timer as you would any function or meeting. If the walk is at work, what better time to brainstorm than when the blood is pumping?
- Pick a parking spot further away from the entrance of your destination.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator; walk up the escalator.
- Take your pet for a walk. A pet's squiggling enthusiasm is nothing but infectious.
- Walk with a family member or friend.
- If you use transit, get off a few stops early and walk the rest of the way to your destination.