

Start Walking Guide

Working for a Healthier Tennessee is providing general health information. The information provided is not intended to treat any medical condition you may have nor is it meant to replace the care you get from your doctor or other health professionals. Consult with your physician before starting an exercise program.

Benefits of Walking

Walking can help you improve your health and encourage you to increase your physical activity. It's a simple, positive change you can make to improve your heart health. [Research has shown](#) the benefits of walking for at least 30 minutes most days of the week can help you:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Lose body fat.
- Prevent or manage conditions including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, cancer and type 2 diabetes.
- Improve heart health.
- Strengthen your bones and muscles.
- Improve muscle endurance.
- Increase energy levels.
- Improve your mood, brain health, memory and sleep.
- Improve your balance and coordination.
- Strengthen your immune system.
- Reduce stress and tension.

Types of Walkers	
Novice	Has never walked as a form of exercise or has not in years. May be considered inactive or sedentary.
Beginner	Has walked extra for exercise in the past six months but does not walk routinely every month.
Often	Walks or runs for exercise at least some of every month for the past six months.
Frequent	Walks or runs for exercise at least weekly for the past six months.

Determine Your Baseline Steps

A baseline is a starting point from which you can measure your progress. For your walking program, your baseline will be the number of steps you normally take in a typical day while doing your regular activities. Set and wear a pedometer or other device, and at the end of a typical day record the number of steps you've taken. This number will be your baseline.



Use the Talk Test to Determine Intensity of Exercise

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) and Prevention, exercise is:

- **Light intensity** if you can sing while doing the activity.
- **Moderate intensity** if you can have a conversation comfortably while doing the activity.
- **Vigorous intensity** if you are too out of breath to have a conversation while participating in the activity

Step Safely

When walking, remember to:

- Wear appropriate clothing and [shoes](#).
- Drink plenty of water to [stay hydrated](#).
- Prevent injury by stopping or slowing down to read or set your pedometer.
- Keep your eyes on the path and in the direction you're walking.
- Always use handrails when you're walking up or down stairs.

Increasing Your Walking Routine

Build up your walking routine by walking for a longer time or distance, at a higher intensity or more often. It is recommended you start slowly and gradually increase.

The *novice walker* should increase walking by small amounts of time, distance or frequency. Increase by one to five minutes or 20 to 50 extra steps. Work up to being able to walk non-stop for 10 minutes at a light or moderate intensity.

Increase walking only after you can walk and talk at your current level without difficulty. You may need to set several mini [S.M.A.R.T.](#) goals before you're able to reach your overall S.M.A.R.T. goal.

The [American Heart Association](#) recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity, or a combination of both, preferably spread throughout the week. The time can be broken down into smaller sessions. For example, three 10-minute sessions each day.

The *beginner walker*, *often walker* and *frequent walker* can increase walking by time, distance, level of intensity or frequency, adding movement such as swinging arms or increasing resistance such as adding ankle weights.

Ways to Get Extra Steps

- Park your car further away from your destination.
- Walk during your breaks and at lunchtime.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk to a co-worker's office instead of calling or emailing.
- Take the long way to the water fountain, kitchen, cafeteria, restrooms, etc.

Avoiding Injuries When Walking

- Walk on designated paths, trails, sidewalks or other walkways.
- Listen to your body; monitor your level of fatigue, [heart rate](#) and physical discomfort.
- Be aware of signs of overexertion, including shortness of breath, muscle soreness, dizziness or lightheadedness.
- Take a few minutes before starting a long walk to warm up muscles. Try [these light stretches for walking](#).
- Wear shoes that provide support, traction and have non-slippery soles.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day to stay hydrated.
- If you notice signs and symptoms of health problems, stop walking for exercise and seek medical attention.

Things You May Wish to Measure

Miles and Steps (*1 mile is 5,280 feet*)

Average Number of Steps	Miles	Average Number of Steps	Miles
500	.25 (1/4)	5,500	2.75
1,000	.50 (1/2)	6,000	3.00
1,500	.75 (3/4)	6,500	3.25
2,000	1.00	7,000	3.50
2,500	1.25	7,500	3.75
3,000	1.50	8,000	4.00
3,500	1.75	8,500	4.25
4,000	2.00	9,000	4.50
4,500	2.25	9,500	4.75
5,000	2.50	10,000	5.00

Calories Burned

The easiest way to determine calories burned during a walking workout is by your weight and walking speed.

The first grid, provided by [Healthline](#), is based on walking for an hour on a flat surface. The second grid shows how the calories burned increases dramatically by walking uphill.

Weight	2.0 mph	2.5 mph	3.0 mph	3.5 mph	4.0 mph
130 lbs.	148 cal.	177 cal.	195 cal.	244 cal.	295 cal.
155 lbs.	176 cal.	211 cal.	232 cal.	267 cal.	352 cal.
180 lbs.	204 cal.	245 cal.	270 cal.	311 cal.	409 cal.
205 lbs.	233 cal.	279 cal.	307 cal.	354 cal.	465 cal.

Weight	3.5 mph – flat surface	3.5 mph - uphill
130 lbs.	224 cal.	354 cal.
155 lbs.	276 cal.	422 cal.
180 lbs.	311 cal.	490 cal.
205 lbs.	354 cal.	558 cal.



Ways to Burn More Calories:

(Be sure to properly warm up before adding the following suggestions.)

- **Interval training:** Varying time and intensity. For example, set a timer for one minute to walk at a brisk pace, followed by two minutes at a moderate intensity. Continue this rhythm for the duration of your walk. As your cardiovascular endurance improves, increase your time at the vigorous pace.
- **Change walking route:** Finding routes in your community or hiking trails that include steps or hills is a fun way to provide variety. This will continue to challenge your body and mind.
- **Increase distance:** The body needs movement. The more it gets, the more calories it burns. Be sure to gradually increase the length of your walking route to allow your body to adapt and prevent injury. You may discover that you're covering more distance in less time!
- **Wear a backpack:** The added weight creates resistance, requiring your body to work harder. When you start, it's best to get a comfortable one and gradually add weight. For example, an eight oz. water bottle is ½ pound, whereas 48 oz. is three pounds.

Physical Activity Resources

- [Stretches for Walking \(American Heart Association\)](#)
- [Couch to 5K Walking Plan](#)
- [Sit Less Move More Handout](#)
- [Hamstring Stretch: Proper Form to Avoid Injury \(3-min. video\)](#)
- [Easy Mobility Warm-up \(6 min. video\)](#)

