

getting started



The following list provided by the Rehabilitation Services Department at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

start slowly

Begin slowly especially if you have not been exercising regularly before. The American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. That would be 30 minutes, at least 5 days per week. You can begin with increments of even 10 minutes, and add them up to get your 150 minute total. If you do start with only 10 minutes of time, your first priority would be to increase your time to 30 minutes per day, so add 5 minutes per week until you are at 30 minutes. Once you are able to walk for 30 minutes everyday, you can work on increasing the intensity.

exercise at a moderate intensity for best results

Take the “Talk test.” During light exercise you would be able to sing while you are exercising. For Moderate level exercise you would not be able to sing but you should be able to talk while walking. If you are too out of breath to talk, then you are working too hard. Your goal is to be exercising at a moderate level for 30 minutes per day. If you start at the light level of exercise, work your way up to moderate as you become more used to walking. As your body becomes better conditioned, you will notice that it is easier to walk. Your body will become more efficient, and you actually have to walk faster to get the same benefit.

wear comfortable shoes

It is not necessary to buy expensive shoes, but you should wear a shoe that is made for walking. The shoe will have cushioning and support in the right places.

- The heel should be made from a material that provides shock absorption and it should grip your heel bone firmly and not allow sliding.
- The sole of the shoe should bend at the ball of the foot and provide overall cushioning
- The arch support or insole of the shoe should support the arch of your foot.
- The toe box should allow enough room for your toes to move.
- If you are buying shoes, shop for them later in the day when feet are more swollen, and bring the socks you will be walking in to insure a good fit. Walk around in the store for long enough to make sure they feel comfortable.
- You should replace your shoes when they begin to look worn out since the materials that provide the cushioning will lose some of their shock absorbing capability.

muscle soreness

Starting any new exercise program sometimes can result in muscle soreness. You may have soreness of the leg muscles after beginning a walking program but don't let that discourage you. The soreness will go away after a few days. If you are really sore, you may have been walking too fast. Lighten up on your walking intensity and try avoiding hills and if that doesn't help, take a day of rest. If your soreness doesn't improve in a few days, call your doctor or physical therapist.

track your progress

It may take 6 to 8 weeks to notice big changes in your fitness level but you can set smaller goals or targets to meet on a weekly basis. Track the increase in minutes you are able to walk or the increase in speed when you walk. Are you less tired? Less sore? Are you sleeping better? Feel like you have more energy? Losing weight? Be sure to track your progress each week and give yourself credit for all the work you are doing. Share your progress with friends and co-workers.

stay with it

Starting a new exercise program is hard, but staying with it is even harder! The best way to stay on track with a walking program is to plan ahead to deal with the things that could disrupt your progress.

Not enough time? Decide to make exercise a priority and schedule your walk into your day. Remember that this is a commitment you are making to your own health.

Too tired at the end of the day? Get up earlier and walk in the morning or at lunch time.

Find walking too boring? Plan to walk with friends, listen to music as your walk, or walk outside where you can enjoy the scenery. Vary the route to keep it more interesting.

Afraid of injuring yourself? Walking is low impact and can be done at low speed, and beginning at small amounts of time to avoid injury.