

How do I stretch?

Stretch gently after you warm up your muscles with an easy 5-minute walk, and again after you cool down. Try doing the stretches listed below. Do not bounce or hold your breath when you stretch. Perform slow movements and stretch only as far as you feel comfortable.



Side Reach

Reach one arm over your head and to the side. Keep your hips steady and your shoulders straight to the side. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat on the other side.



Leg Curl

Pull your right foot to your buttocks with your right hand. Stand straight and keep your knee pointing straight to the ground. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with your left foot and hand.



Wall Push

Lean your hands on a wall with your feet about 3 to 4 feet away from the wall. Bend one knee and point it toward the wall. Keep your back leg straight with your foot flat and your toes pointed straight ahead. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat with the other leg.



Knee Pull

Lean your back against a wall. Keep your head, hips, and feet in a straight line. Pull one knee to your chest, hold for 10 seconds, then repeat with the other leg.



Hamstring Stretch

Sit on a sturdy bench or hard surface so that your left leg is stretched out on the bench with your toes pointing up. Keep your right foot flat on the floor. Straighten your back, and if you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh, hold for 10 seconds and repeat with your right leg. [If you do not yet feel a stretch, lean forward from your hips until you do feel a stretch.]

Taking the First Step

Walking correctly is very important.

- Walk with your chin up and your shoulders held slightly back.
- Walk so that the heel of your foot touches the ground first. Roll your weight forward.
- Walk with your toes pointed forward.
- Swing your arms as you walk.

The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts.

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A Sample Walking Program

Warm-up Time	Fast-walk Time	Cool-down Time	Total Time
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WEEK 1

Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 5 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	15 minutes
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WEEK 2

Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 8 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	18 minutes
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WEEK 3

Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 11 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	21 minutes
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Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 14 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	24 minutes
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Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 17 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	27 minutes
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Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 20 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	30 minutes
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Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 23 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	33 minutes
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WEEK 8

Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 26 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	36 minutes
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WEEK 9 and Beyond

Walk slowly 5 minutes	Walk briskly 30 minutes	Walk slowly 5 minutes	40 minutes
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If you walk less than three times per week, give yourself more than a week before increasing your pace and frequency.



WALKING...



A STEP in the RIGHT Direction!



Why walk?

Walking is one of the easiest ways to be physically active. You can do it almost anywhere and at any time. Walking is also inexpensive—all you need is a pair of shoes with sturdy heel support. Walking may:

- Give you more energy and make you feel good.
- Reduce stress and help you relax.
- Tone your muscles.
- Increase the number of calories your body uses.
- Strengthen your bones and muscles.
- Improve your stamina and your fitness.
- Lower your risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.
- Give you an opportunity to socialize actively with friends and family.

For all of these reasons, people have started walking programs. If you would like to start your own program, read and follow the information provided in this pamphlet.



Is it okay for me to walk?

Answer the following questions before you begin a walking program.

- Has your health care provider told you that you have heart trouble, diabetes, or asthma?
- When you are physically active, do you have pains in your chest, neck, shoulder, or arm?
- Do you often feel faint or have dizzy spells?
- Do you feel extremely breathless after you have been physically active?
- Has your health care provider told you that you have high blood pressure?
- Has your health care provider told you that you have bone or joint problems, such as arthritis?
- Are you over 50 years old and not used to doing any moderate physical activity?
- Are you pregnant?
- Do you smoke?
- Do you have a health problem or physical reason not mentioned here that might keep you from starting a walking program?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, please check with your health care provider before starting a walking program or other form of physical activity.

How do I start a walking program?

Leave time in your busy schedule to follow a walking program that will work for you. Keep the following points in mind as you plan your program:

- Choose a safe place to walk. Find a partner or group of people to walk with you. Your walking partner(s) should be able to walk with you on the same schedule and at the same speed.
- Wear shoes with proper arch support, a firm heel, and thick flexible soles that will cushion your feet and absorb shock. Before you buy a new pair, be sure to walk in them in the store.
- Wear clothes that will keep you dry and comfortable. Look for synthetic fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin.
- For extra warmth in winter, wear a knit cap. To stay cool in summer, wear a baseball cap or visor.
- Think of your walk in three parts. Warm up by walking slowly for 5 minutes. Then, increase your speed and do a fast walk. Finally, cool down by walking slowly again for 5 minutes.
- Do light stretching after your warm-up and cool-down.
- Try to walk at least three times per week. Each week, add 2 or 3 minutes to your walk. If you walk less than three times per week, you may need more time to adjust before you increase the pace or frequency of your walk.

- To avoid stiff or sore muscles and joints, start gradually. Over several weeks, begin walking faster, going further, and walking for longer periods of time.
- Set goals and rewards. Examples of goals are participating in a fun walk or walking continuously for 30 minutes.
- Keep track of your progress with a walking journal or log.
- The more you walk, the better you may feel and the more calories you may burn.

Experts recommend 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. If you cannot do 30 minutes at a time, try walking for shorter amounts and gradually working up to it.

Safety Tips

Keep safety in mind when you plan your route and the time of your walk.

- If you walk at dawn, dusk, or night, wear a reflective vest or brightly colored clothing.
- Walk in a group when possible.
- Notify your local police station of your group's walking time and route.
- Do not wear jewelry.
- Do not wear headphones.
- Be aware of your surroundings.

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