

Starting a Walking Club

- 1. Gather interested people together.** Groups of people come together because of common interest. A shared desire to walk is a great place to start, but you may want to discuss what is important to group members. Some questions for your group may include: Can anyone join? Are there group goals for walking that we might want to identify?
- 2. Organize the activities.** Groups work well when group members feel like they are contributing and leading some parts of the groups' activities. Consider having people take the lead role in the following areas: publicity, route planning, logistics (group members names and phone numbers), tracking progress and party planning.
- 3. Recognize success.** Recognition is a great motivator to keep people involved in the club whether people are trying to reach individual or group goals. Recognition can take many forms from certificates for walking milestones that can be printed on a computer, to gatherings of people complete with snacks. Recognition events can also encourage new people to get involved.

If you like to walk as part of a group or team, you may want to consider creating a Wellness Group to help get your walking group started. A Wellness Group can help co-workers come together to share ideas (formally or informally) and create ownership or buy in to improve health and work-life. For more information on creating a Wellness Group, please request a copy of the 'Health Promotion Toolkit' from the Healthy Workplace Department by calling 473-5817.



START WALKING²!

Focus on the enjoyment of being more physically active. Although walking doesn't require lessons or specialized equipment, the following suggestions can help ensure a positive walking experience.

- **To start, pick a simple destination.**
Begin with a walk around your work area or another familiar place. Sidewalks and pathways should be level and free of cracks to minimize your risk of falling. Choose a route that is pleasant, perhaps one with grass, flowers, and trees. Ensure that your route is appropriately lit if you choose to walk at night.
- **Dress for the weather.**
Choose clothing that is right for the season. Wear layers of comfortable clothing that won't restrict your movement. Protect your eyes and skin during all seasons. Don't forget to put on that sunscreen, and on sunny days, wear your hat and sunglasses.
- **Pamper those feet.**
What's most important is that your shoes feel comfortable. Inexpensive running shoes are great for walking if they fit well.

Here are some things to look for in a good shoe:

- Ensure you have about a thumb's width of space between the tip of your longest toe and the end of the shoe when you stand up.
- Look for shoes that fit the widest part of your foot. The shoe's heel should fit firmly on your foot to minimize the movement up and down.
- Shoes with flexibility under the balls of your feet (that is, not too stiff) will also be more comfortable. Leather, nylon or synthetic fabric are all suitable for your shoe's outer material.

• Warm-up, stretch, cool-down and stretch.

- Perform gentle stretching exercises for the muscles in your lower legs and mobility exercises for your ankles with each walking workout. (This is especially important for people who have not been regularly physically active.)
- Listen to your body. Stretch only until you begin to feel the muscle pull (not to the point of discomfort).

- **Start slowly and build up.**

- Canada's Physical Activity Guide recommends that we accumulate 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. The good news is that you can accumulate your activity in 10-minute sessions. You can also focus on duration, frequency and/or intensity of your walk. It is best to start slowly and to focus first on the duration of your walks.
- Gradually extend the length (duration) of your walks before you decide to walk more quickly. Experts suggest increasing the length of your walk a little at a time until you reach the recommended 30 to 60 minutes of daily physical activity. For example, if you have been successfully completing a 20-minute walk for a few weeks, try adding two to four more minutes (making it a 22 to 24-minute walk) for the next few weeks.
- Once you have built up the duration of your walk, start on the frequency and intensity. If you are unable to increase the length of your walk, try to increase the number of days you walk each week (this is called frequency). If you have been walking twice per week, try adding one or two more sessions each week.
- Finally, you may want to cover more distance in the same amount of time (this is intensity). Walking briskly increases your health benefits more quickly than a leisurely walk. To ensure that you are walking at a safe and appropriate intensity, use the Talk Test as a guide. As you walk, you should be able to WALK and TALK. If you are too short of breath to talk, then you need to slow down your pace.

- **Schedule time to walk.**

- Choose walking times that suit the schedule and routine of your group. Schedule your work outs into your daytimer as if they were important appointments. If you think of your workout as an appointment with yourself, you are more likely to keep it. Place a high priority on your health and well-being. Remind yourself about the health benefits you gain by walking regularly.

- **Walk safely.**

- Consult your physician before starting a walking program if you have not been regularly active. Remember to drink at least 150 mL of water (a little more than half a cup) for every 15 to 20 minutes of walking. Choose safe, well-lit routes and consider walking with others. Do shrubs block the sidewalk or pathway? Were the streets easy to cross? How busy is the traffic on your walk? Be aware of your surroundings-you might want to leave your headphones at home.

²Adapted from:

<http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/servlet/ContentServer?cid=1053537051929&pagename=CHN-RCS/CHNResource/CHNResourcePageTemplate&c=CHNResource> accessed June 27/07

