WALKING FOR FITNESS

What is Fitness Walking

Fitness walking refers to the type of walking that produces health and fitness benefits. For you to be a fitness walker, you should walk briskly enough, long enough, and often enough to produce the desirable health and fitness benefits, in addition, you should give proper attention to correct walking techniques.

Fitness Walking—An Ideal Form Of Physical Activity

People are interested in fitness walking because it is an enjoyable and simple way to improve their health. Fitness walking can be an escape from a high-tech lifestyle. There is no need for machines, videos or expensive club memberships. You are not excluded from fitness walking because of your age, body type, or skill level. Plus, walking is convenient—you can walk almost anywhere and almost anytime.

Fitness walking is a versatile form of physical activity. The pace can be slow to start and gradually increase as conditioning improves. The techniques are not difficult to learn, and there are several types of walking to choose from: strolling, everyday walking, hiking, backpacking, adventure walking, snowshoeing, stairwalking, fitness walking, and racewalking.

For these reasons and many others, health professionals are recommending fitness walking as an excellent form of physical activity for all ages.

Can Fitness Walking Improve Physical Fitness?

For years, it was thought that walking would not provide enough physical activity to produce a cardiovascular benefit; however, scientific research has proven that fitness walkers are able to reach the exercise intensity necessary to improve cardiovascular fitness. When you use correct walking techniques, fitness walking improves most of the muscles in your body. Walking briskly increases the demand for oxygen, which makes your circulatory and respiratory systems work harder than usual, improving the functioning of your heart and lungs.

Why Exercise?

The leading causes of death in the United States are related to lifestyle. One harmful lifestyle behavior is sedentary living. If you have an inactive lifestyle, there will be a decline in your body's ability to function. If you allow this deterioration to continue, eventually one of your organ systems will not be able to perform its life-sustaining function. When this occurs you will experience a life-threatening illness or death.

Long before death, however, there may be years of "not feeling well"— nothing definite, no specific symptoms. The feeling that life is difficult rather than enjoyable, that it is all you can do to plow through another day—these are feelings frequently expressed by people in poor physical condition.

The good news is that a moderate amount of exercise on a regular basis will improve the functioning of your body. Exercise can help you look better, feel better, and enjoy life.

Why Aerobic Exercise?

You are an aerobic organism. The term aerobic describes life forms that require oxygen. You could live weeks without food, days without water, but only minutes without oxygen. How well your body operates depends on your ability to get oxygen to every living cell.

Oxygen is brought into your body with the air you breathe into your lungs. Approximately one-fifth of normal, unpolluted air is oxygen. Some of the oxygen that enters your lungs is transferred into you blood. Your heart then pumps the oxygenated blood to all of your cells.

Any lifestyle behavior that reduces the functioning of your respiratory or circulatory system reduces your ability to get life-sustaining oxygen to your cells. Sedentary living reduces your ability to deliver oxygen to all parts of your body. This decline in oxygen delivery could be considered a slow form of suffocation and results in "not feeling very well."

If this deterioration continues, eventually you will only be able to take in enough oxygen to sustain your life in a resting state. This does not leave any room for adjustment to an increased demand, such as a physical or emotional emergency. A poorly conditioned person may experience a sudden demand for increased oxygen delivery. Since his or her body is not capable of delivering more oxygen to the heart muscle, now working harder than normal, some of the oxygen-starved heart muscle tissue may die. The affected tissue can no longer contract; therefore, the heart may not be able to continue to pump oxygenated blood to any of the other living cells of the body. This is a simplified explanation of one type of heart attack. Without a continuous supply of life-sustaining oxygen, the other cells of the body cannot survive.

Since you are an aerobic organism, exercises that improve your ability to obtain and use oxygen (aerobic exercises) are beneficial.

Why Fitness Walking?

Lifetime Exercise Because it is a low-impact activity, walking can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Almost Everyone Can Participate No specific sport skills are necessary to achieve a beneficial amount of exercise.

Natural and Safe Exercise Your body was designed for movement, not inactivity. The force of landing on each foot during jogging is about three and one half to four times your body weight. In contrast, the force of landing on each foot during walking is about one to one and one half times your body weight. Therefore, joint and muscle injuries are less likely to occur with a walking program.

Inexpensive Fitness walking does not require expensive facilities, equipment, or membership. The most expensive and important equipment for fitness walking is a good pair of walking shoes.

Fat Loss Uses calories, increases basal metabolic rate, shrinks fat cells, and prevents muscle loss.

Easier to Start and Stick With It's familiar, convenient and accessible.

Posture Fitness walking promotes good posture by strengthening many of your muscles.

Social Activity Walking is an excellent family and group activity.

Get Fit for Sports For people who have not been exercising, walking is recommended as a starter program to prepare for participation in sports.

Rehabilitation of Injuries Walking can be an important exercise in the recovery process because the intensity of the exercise and the workload placed on the injured tissue can be controlled to a greater extent than in many other exercises.

Cardiac Rehabilitation It is a good exercise for those recovering from heart attacks because walking is an exercise that they: are familiar with, are not afraid of, can continue for the rest of their lives, can easily monitor, can start at a low level, and can progressively increase.

Exercise During Pregnancy Walking is one of the safest and best exercises during pregnancy. It is a good exercise for pregnant women because it is a low impact activity and can be easily monitored and adjusted to the fairly rapid biological changes that occur during pregnancy.

Exercise after pregnancy

Fit in with Your Daily Routine You can choose to walk at a time that best fits your schedule.

Mental Benefits Walking is good for your brain as well as the rest of your body.

Psychological Benefits Improved sleeping habits, increased sense of well being, relief of anxiety and depression, improved creativity and problem-solving ability, positive self-esteem, stress reduction, and better quality of life.

Walking Techniques

Technique 1: Posture and Alignment

For the smoothest walking motion, maintain correct posture and body alignment. Technique 2: Heel Contact

From a position of correct posture, swing one leg forward. Land on your heel. Do not land flat-footed or on the ball of your foot.

Technique 3: Heel-to-Toe Roll

Once your heel makes contact with the ground, begin to roll your foot forward, keeping your weight slightly toward the outer edge of your foot until reaching your toes. Keep your knees pointing straight ahead.

Technique 4: Push-Off

Following the heel-to-toe roll, continue your forward motion with a push-off from your toes. Resist the temptation to pick up your foot early, as you might do in casual walking.

Technique 5: Arm Swing

To increase your walking speed, bend your arms to about a 90-degree angle at the elbow joint. Your hands should be in a relaxed fist position, with your palms facing inward. In this position your arms should swing naturally forward and backward from the shoulder joint. Avoid side to side swaying of your upper body. On the forward swing, your hand should rise to the level of your xiphoid process. On the backswing your hand should stop at the waist/hip area.

Technique 6: Hip Movement

Using the hips more reduces the amount of up-and-down movement with each step, converting wasted vertical energy into useful horizontal energy. Also the abdominal and hip muscles are exercised more vigorously with increased hip movement.

Technique 7: Leg Glide

At the point of contact your leg should be straight, but not rigidly locked into extension. Reach out with the front leg and make contact with the ground using the longest practical stride. Then glide smoothly across your leg and foot finishing with your leg extended and a final push-off from your toes before bending at the knee and swinging your leg forward. The Right Amount OF Exercise

i

The right amount of exercise is determined by the characteristics of FITT-frequency, intensity, time, and type.

Frequency The recommended frequency for fitness walking is three to seven days per week.

Intensity Intensity refers to how hard you need to exercise to benefit from each training session. Exercise heart rate provides an indication of how hard you are exercising. A guideline for fitness walking is to reach an exercise

heart rate between 60 and 85 percent of your maximum heart rate.

Time You should walk for 20 to 60 minutes at your prescribed exercise heart rate.

Type Fitness walking is considered the right type of exercise because it is aerobic.

Terminology

Fitness Walking -The type of walking that produces measurable health benefits

Life expectancy - The average number of years people born in a given year are expected to live based on a set of age-specific death rates.

Quality of Life - Reflects a general sense of happiness and satisfaction with your life.

Aerobic - Requiring oxygen to live and thrive.

Exercise - Bodily exertion that is done to develop, maintain, or improve physical fitness.

Sedentary - A way of living characterized by only minimal physical activity.

Warm-Up - Exercise movements designed to gradually prepare your body for more vigorous activity.

Cool-down - Exercise movements designed to gradually reduce the intensity of activity and help your body make a smooth and safe transition from a high level of activity back toward a lower level of activity.

Cardiovascular Fitness - The ability of your heart, blood vessels, blood, and lungs to deliver oxygen to your cells, especially muscle cells during long-term physical activity.

Exercise Heart Rate - Heart rate during exercise. Take it immediately after you stop exercising, within 5 seconds, and taking a heart rate count for 15 seconds.

Heart Rate - The rate at which your heart pumps blood. (Beats per minute)

Pulse - The rhythmic expansion of the arteries caused by the contractions of the heart.

Carotid Artery - A blood vessel in the neck often used to count the heart rate.

Maximum Heart Rate - The fastest your heart can beat under the most strenuous conditions, it is NOT your exercise heart rate.

Horizontal Energy - Walking preformed with a minimum of up-and-down movement.

Vertical Energy - A type of up and down movement that wastes useful energy for walking.

Finding Your Target Heart Range

Your *target heart range* is the range in which your heart rate should be during exercise for maximum cardiorespiratory endurance. To find your target range:

- 1 Find your *resting heart rate* by sitting quietly for five minutes and then taking your pulse.
- 2 Subtract your age from 220 to find your maximum heart rate.
- 3 Subtract your resting heart rate (the result of Step 1) from the number you arrived at Step 2, your maximum heart rate.
- 4 Multiply the number you arrived at in Step 3 twice—first by 8 5 percent and again by 60 percent.
- 5 Add your resting heart rate to the result from Step 4 when you multiplied by 85 percent: then add your resting heart rate to the number you got when you multiplied by 60 percent.
- 6 The resulting totals represent your target heart range. Compare your target heart range with other classmates.