



## 4 REASONS WHY WALKING IS REAL EXERCISE: HOW TO REAP HEALTH BENEFITS WHATEVER THE PACE

People often consider walking more of a recreation than a sport, believing it less beneficial to your health compared to "real exercise." What these people seem to forget is that exercise is not measured solely in sweat. If included as part of a routine fitness plan, walking can get your heart pumping, muscles working, and fat burning—all of the things that a real workout is meant to achieve.

Here are 4 reasons why walking is exercise in the truest sense of the word:

### **Cardiovascular Benefits**

Walking at a brisk pace raises your heart rate to a moderate intensity level beneficial to your cardiovascular health. As a reference point, a brisk pace is one to where you are able to talk but won't have the lung capacity to sing.

If you take your pulse in the moderate intensity zone, it should be between 50 percent and 70 percent of your maximum heart rate (MHR). Your MHR can be roughly estimated by subtracting your age from 220.

In order to achieve tangible benefits, aim for a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per day, five days a week. You don't have to do it all at once; you can break it into sessions of no less than 10 minutes each.

Try this 20-minute brisk walking workout:

- Start at an easy pace for one to three minutes to warm up.
- Increase to 50 to 70 percent of your MHR for 20 minutes.
- To cool down, slow to an easy pace for one to three minutes.

### **Aerobic Fitness**

By walking at a vigorous pace, you can improve your aerobic fitness. Doing so moves your heart rate into a moderate-high intensity zone of 70 percent to 80 percent of your MHR. At this pace, you will be able to speak but not in full sentences.

By doing this for 30 minutes per day, at least three to four days a week, you can increase your lung capacity and improve the transfer of oxygen to the bloodstream.

You can achieve this pace by not only walking faster but by increasing the incline on your treadmill, walking up hills, or combining walking with short jogging intervals.

Try this aerobic walking workout:

- Start at an easy pace for five minutes.
- Increase to 70 to 80 percent of your MHR for 30 to 50 minutes.
- Cool down by walking an easy pace for five minutes.

## **Weight Control**

One of the benefits of routine walking is that it can help you control your weight or even shed a few pounds when combined a reduced-calorie diet.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week to help lose weight. To maintain your weight, aim for 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise per week.

While 45 minutes of brisk walking can encourage your body to burn stored fat, it can only do so if you don't replace those fats in your diet. To the end, it is important to speak with your doctor or nutritionist to ensure you are burning more calories than you consume and that you do so safely.

Try this fat-burning walking workout:

- Start at an easy to moderate pace for 10 minutes.
- Increase to 60 to 70 percent of your MHR for 30 to 60 minutes.
- Cool down with five to 10 minutes at an easy pace.

## **Muscles and Joints**

Walking is beneficial even if you are unable to do so at a brisk pace. Walking at an easy pace works your muscles and joints, improving your flexibility and strength even when you are not being aerobically challenged.

Walking regularly is especially helpful if you are overweight or living with arthritis.<sup>2</sup> By walking at a slower pace, you minimize the stress on your knees, ankles, hips, and lower back.

While it doesn't have the cardiovascular benefits of brisk walking, low-intensity walking can slow joint deterioration and improve your mood and energy levels if done consistently. There is also evidence it can improve your metabolic health.

According to research from the University of Bedfordshire, just two minutes of low-intensity walking done every 20 minutes improved blood sugar control in obese people compared to those who simply sat or stood still.

The same benefits can be extended to office workers who spend much of their day behind a desk. Getting up and walking for a few minutes can translate the better health irrespective of your age or health status.

## **A Word From Verywell**

If you are addicted to your fitness tracker and make an effort to reach 10,000 steps per day, you are certainly on the right track to achieving good health. But don't mistake the number of steps for the quality of a workout. Clearly, 10,000 steps done a low-intensity is unlikely to deliver the same health benefits as 5,000 done at a strenuous pace.

When starting a walking program, be clear about your goals and what you need to do to achieve them. Higher quality trackers, like Fitbit, are able to analyze your steps and tell you how many have been done at an aerobic pace. If you want to ensure you are getting "real exercise," focus on that latter figure and not just the step count.

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