

**T**hink about it. Walking is the one activity that almost everyone can do without any cost, equipment or special environment. So why aren't you doing it? If you can put one foot in front of the other, you have a gym that can go with you anywhere and everywhere. This article will explain the whys and hows of the simplest way to get in shape. So lace up your sneakers and get ready for a journey to better health and fitness.

## 10 Good Reasons to Walk

**1. Your heart.** Walking keeps your heart healthy by lowering low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol (the “bad” cholesterol) and raising high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (the “good” cholesterol). A regular walking program also reduces your risk of developing high blood pressure, a factor that contributes to heart disease.

**2. Your health.** In addition to decreasing the risk of heart disease, a regular walking program can lower your risk of developing diabetes and certain types of cancer. Why wouldn't you?

**3. Your weight.** At the proper frequency, intensity and duration, walking is one of the best exercises with the fewest risk factors. If you want to drop those pesky pounds, participate in a regular walking program.

**4. Your mood.** Regular walking can reduce feelings of depression and anxiety.

**5. Stress.** A brisk walk is a great stress buster. Try it the next time you need to blow off some steam.

**6. Your fitness level.** Walking is the new running. You don't need to pound the pavement to reap the benefits and improve your fitness level. Done properly, walking can take you to the next level of cardio-respiratory fitness.

**7. Sleep.** We always seem to want more. Regular exercise can improve the quality of your sleep so that you wake up feeling rested and energized.

**8. Your sex life.** Too tired for sex? Uncomfortable with the way you look? Regular exercise can boost your self esteem and leave you feeling energized, having a positive effect on your sex life.

**9. Your bones.** A consistent, weight bearing exercise program helps to strengthen bones and prevent osteoporosis, preventing immobilizing fractures.

**10. Your brain.** Regular exercise promotes clearer, more creative thinking. Want to develop “the edge”? Add regular exercise to your routine.



# The First Step

By Gina Mancuso, PT

*“Walking is man's best medicine”*  
Hippocrates

## Set Yourself up for Success

Before you get started on a regular program, there are a few things to do: First, get a good pair of walking shoes. Expensive sneakers are not necessary, but it is important to have a pair of shoes with a comfortable, supportive arch. Worn out sneakers can lead to sore feet and nagging injuries.

## Wear the proper clothing

Whether you walk indoors on a track or treadmill, or outside in the sun or snow, your clothing is important. Wear clothing that will allow perspiration to evaporate. Dress in layers if you will be outdoors in the cold and don't forget to cover your head and your hands. The more comfortable you are, the more likely you will be consistent with your routine.

## Protect your skin from the sun

Always wear sunscreen when walking outdoors, no matter what time of year.

## Protect yourself

When walking in the dark, be sure to wear reflective and/or light colored clothing. Walk with a buddy and always be aware of your surroundings.

## Designing your Program

If you are new to exercise, it is so important to begin slowly and easily, to prevent injury and develop 'exercise confidence'. Begin your program so that you will be successful. Start with small goals that are achievable, so that you can feel good about your accomplishments.

As you develop your baseline fitness level, the need for variations in intensity, frequency and duration arise. In order to make gains in cardio-respiratory fitness, you must challenge your body to continue to see results. For example, if you have been walking at the same pace day in and day out, walk faster for shorter periods of time. If you always walk the same route (or the same level on the treadmill), add hills and elevations to increase the intensity. Instead of your usual three times a week walking schedule, add a fourth day to increase the demands on your body. Making these changes in small increments will ensure your success and decrease the risk of injury.

## Set SMART goals

*Be Specific.*

Setting specific goals leaves you no room for interpretation. For example, "I will walk four times this week after work, for two miles in thirty minutes".

*Make Your Goals Measurable.*

Stating "I will walk on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays," instead of "I will walk after work," gives you an exact program to follow without any excuses.

*Be Sure Your Goals are Attainable and Reasonable.*

Unrealistic goals will set you up for failure and discourage you from continuing. Allow yourself to experience the joy of success!

*Put a Time Frame on Your Goal.*

"I will walk four times a week for three months" gives you an end point and an opportunity for re-evaluation. At the end

of the three month period, you have the chance to adjust your program if necessary.

## Stay Motivated

A regular walking program is simple, but it's not easy. Staying in it for the long haul will assure that you attain your goals. And you'll need support. Make exercise fun by doing it with a partner. Set challenges for yourself or for each other. Vary your routine, by walking different routes, listening to a variety of music or books on tape. Have a reward when you achieve a goal. The point is, a regular walking program can be a fun part of your life when you build a program that excites and motivates you.

Once you take that first step, you will be on a journey to better health and fitness. A journey always worth the trip!



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