



Temple University
Collaborative

On Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Beginning a Walking Program

Fact Sheet for Consumers



Beginning a Walking Program: *Fact Sheet for Consumers*

Congratulations! You've taken the first step to improving your health! Walking is one of the easiest physical activity programs you can participate in. Walking doesn't require a gym membership or special equipment and it can be used as a strategy to help increase your own engagement in the community. In fact, walking is one of the most popular exercise activities in the United States.¹

Benefits of Walking

Walking has a number of benefits including both physical and mental. Research indicates that walking can lead to reductions in depressive symptoms,^{2,3} anxiety,² stress,² and increased positive emotions.^{3,4} In regards to physical benefits, walking is associated with reduced weight, reduced risk of diabetes, stroke, and heart disease, and increased bone strength.¹ Walking in natural environments like parks or on trails can help you feel more refreshed.⁴

What do I wear?

Walking doesn't require special equipment; however, it is important to plan to wear clothing that fits and is appropriate for the weather.

Clothing Recommendations for Walking Participants

Shoes & Socks	Wear a comfortable pair of shoes that fit well. Shoes that poorly fit may cause pain and/or lead to injury such as blisters or foot cramps. Depending on the walking environment, laced, closed-toed shoes are often the most appropriate option. Socks can help make the necessary adjustment on fit and provide protection from blistering. Clean, dry socks are best for maintaining comfort and health. You don't need to spend a lot of money on your shoes, but the right shoes for you will help you be successful.
Cold Weather Clothing	When it's cold, dress in layers, that way it's easier to adjust if you get too warm. Hats and gloves are also recommended, as the head and hands can lose body heat if not protected.
Warm Weather Clothing	Light colored, lightweight clothing are best for warm temperatures. If you are prone to sunburn, consider sunscreen, long sleeve shirts, and hats. You may prefer to wear sandals in the summer, but, these may not be the most appropriate for walking. Finding out your footwear gives you blisters half way through your walk will be painful and may discourage future participation.

Where should I walk?

The beauty of walking is you can walk almost anywhere! Walking in the community is how the majority of individuals participate in walking. Consider both walking for transportation and walking for enjoyment. Parks, trails, and urban neighborhoods all provide opportunities for walking and can provide novel experiences that may help sustain your participation. Wherever you decide to walk, it's important that you are aware of your surroundings and feel safe. If you initially feel unsafe walking in your neighborhood, talk to a friend, family member, or mental health provider about your concerns. They may help you develop strategies to increase your safety and comfort. Here are some strategies to help increase your own comfort and safety when walking.

Ensuring Safety while Walking

Walk during daylight hours	Walking during the daytime decreases the risk of being a victim. If you prefer walking in the evening or early mornings, walk in well-lit areas.
Walk in parks or designated walking areas	Walking in parks or on walking trails increases the likelihood that other walkers are around. Police officers or parks and recreation employees also patrol these areas to make sure the areas are safe for users.
Walk with a friend	Walking with people helps decrease the risk of becoming a victim
Be familiar with surroundings	When you're aware of your surroundings, you're more likely to recognize and avoid unsafe situations. Identify a few key unchanging landmarks to help avoid getting lost. Remember, as the seasons change, neighborhoods and parks may look very different.

How much should I walk?

Try to incorporate walking into your everyday schedule. Consider walking for transportation and walking for pleasure. The minimum recommended time for participating in physical activity is 10 minutes. If you currently don't participate in any physical activity, try starting with 10-minute walks 3 times per day. This will allow you to get used to walking and then you can gradually increase the time you spend walking and how fast you walk.

If walking is your primary source of physical activity, you should strive for at least 30 minutes per day. There is research that suggests walking less than 30 minutes per day may not improve cardiovascular health. This can be broken up into 10-minute segments. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute suggests the following to start a walking program (see table).

Week	Warm-up	Brisk walking	Cool-down
1 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes
2 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	7 minutes	5 minutes
3 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	9 minutes	5 minutes
4 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	11 minutes	5 minutes
5 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	13 minutes	5 minutes
6 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	15 minutes	5 minutes
7 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	18 minutes	5 minutes
8 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	20 minutes	5 minutes
9 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	23 minutes	5 minutes
10 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	26 minutes	5 minutes
11 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	28 minutes	5 minutes
12 (2-3x/week)	5 minutes	30 minutes	5 minutes

Source: http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/prevent/p_active/walk.html

Set Goals and Monitor Progress

There are several strategies that can be used to monitor walking progress. Put your weekly goals in a place that you see everyday. This could be by your bed or on your refrigerator. That way you are frequently reminded of your goals. As you complete your weekly goals, cross them off! This will help reinforce your continued progress. Some people like to keep a notebook of their physical activity participation. You can write down the total time you spent walking, the distance you traveled, and how you felt during your walk. This might be a good place to write down if you need new shoes or should remember to wear a hat next time.

If you have access to a smart phone or computer, there are also a number of applications that will help you keep track of your physical activity. Google "physical activity monitor" or "tracking physical activity apps" for specific recommendations. Additionally, pedometers and/or accelerometers (e.g., Fitbits, Nike +, etc...) are helpful in tracking actual activity participation. Many health clinics or insurance plans offer free pedometers to members.

Staying Motivated!

Staying motivated is sometimes the hardest part for any physical activity program. Here are some suggestions for sticking with your walking plan.

- Share your goals with others and encourage them to check in on your progress
- Invite others to walk with you. Walking doesn't have to be an activity you do by yourself! Walking with others can be a social motivation to help keep you on target.
- Set long-term goals. Aim to walk in a community 5K, 10K, or even a half-marathon. These events are no longer just for runners. Many individuals sign up to walk with friends. Signing up for these events can help increase your motivation and introduces you to a community of walkers!

References

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