



Beginning a Walking Program: *Fact Sheet for Providers*

Walking is one of the easiest physical activity programs you can initiate within an agency. Walking doesn't require a gym membership or special equipment and it can be used as a strategy to help introduce consumers to their community. In fact, walking is one of the most popular exercise activities in the United States.¹

Benefits of Walking

Individuals with psychiatric disabilities can experience both mental and physical health benefits of participating in a walking program. 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 helps individuals to feel more refreshed.⁴

Pre-Program Planning

Develop recommendations for participant clothing choice

<i>Clothing Recommendations for Walking Participants</i>	
Shoes & Socks	Participants should 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 may be the most appropriate option. Sometimes shoes don't quite fit. Socks can help make the necessary adjustment and provide protection from blistering. Clean, dry socks are best for maintaining comfort and health.
Cold Weather Clothing	In cooler temperatures it's beneficial to dress in layers, that way it's easier to adjust if individuals 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 and light weight clothing is best for warmer temperatures. If individuals are prone to sunburn, sunscreen, long sleeve shirts, and hats reduce the risk. While individuals may prefer to wear sandals in the summer, they may not be the most appropriate for walking. Provide suggestions on appropriate summer footwear for walking prior to the start of any walking program.

Develop strategies for tracking progress and goal attainment.

There are several strategies that can be used to monitor walking progress. If space is available, group goals can be displayed in a public place. This provides a means for publicly monitoring group progress. In addition to group goals, it's important to use the group as an opportunity to help individuals set their own walking goals. Providing participants with a notebook to monitor group activity and individual activity will help integrate walking into daily behavior. Technology can also be used to track progress. More and more, individuals have access to computers and/or smart phones. There are a number of applications that can be used to set and monitor individual goals. Additionally, pedometers and/or accelerometers (e.g., Fitbits, Nike +, etc...) are helpful in tracking actual activity participation.

Ensure Safety

Safety tips	Description
Walk during daylight hours	Walking during the daytime decreases the risk of being a victim. If walking in the evening or early mornings, walk in well-lit areas.

Safety tips	Description
Walk in parks or designated walking areas	Walking in parks or on walking trails increases the likelihood that of other walkers are around. Police officers or parks and recreation employees who want to make sure park users are safe often patrol these areas.
Walk in groups	Walking with people helps decrease the risk of becoming a victim
Be familiar with surroundings	Walking in groups sometimes decreases individual awareness of surroundings. Point out landmarks and encourage participants to notice surroundings. In doing so, participants are more likely to recognize and avoid unsafe situations.

Implementing your Walking Program

Set Goals

Goals are important, because they help keep individuals motivated. Progressive goals can also help prevent boredom. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Association provides the following recommendations for initiating a walking program.⁵ Goals should be set for the group and support provided for individuals to set walking goals to engage in outside of the group.

Track Goals

Provide opportunities to track both group achievements and individual achievements.

Participate in the Community & Vary the Environment

Walking in the community is how the majority of individuals participate in walking. Consider both walking for transportation and walking for enjoyment. Parks, trails, urban neighborhoods, and even shopping centers all provide opportunities for walking and can provide novel experiences that help engage participants.

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

Participate with Others

Walking has benefits for everyone. Invite a variety of staff to participate in the walking program as time allows. Consider hosting or attending community walking events. Events such as an agency hosted 5k walk not only provide opportunities for individuals to walk with other community members, but they also provide opportunities to support causes that may be meaningful for participants. Many awareness walks are free to participate.

References

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