

12 Reasons to WALK!



Walking...we keep hearing it's great for you, here are some reminders as to why!! ✓

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1. Walking can be great active recovery.

Every action has an opposite reaction—and similarly, every high-intensity interval comes with a recovery period. Walking, instead of sitting down or standing still, keeps your muscles warm and your heart pumping. You can also take a few steps between strength movements to add a low-impact cardio boost, Jayel Lewis, a certified international personal trainer and business coach in Philadelphia, explains that Walking also works as standalone active recovery sessions on days you're not doing speedy runs, strength routines, or HIIT classes—and there *should* be days you're not doing them.

Not only does walking give your body a break, but it actually might speed up your recovery, by boosting blood flow through sore, fatigued muscles. "You cannot hit it hard seven days a week; that is not sustainable,"

"You need to have days where you do pull back a little bit, where you acknowledge that your body needs rest but you can still keep moving." So yes, daily exercise is just fine—as long as that includes easy movement like walking.

2. Walking may help your aching body feel better.

Using walking to give your body a break from hard training can ward off overuse injuries in the first place, and it's also an effective way of managing various aches. A 2018 study of 246 adults in the journal *Evidence-Based Practice* found walking worked as well as physical therapy in treating low back pain. In another study of over 1,500 adults published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, just one hour of walking per week delayed disability in people who already had joint pain.

In order to reap these benefits, though, maintaining proper form is important: Most of our strides have adapted to years of injuries and regular habits like sitting, as a result, many of us end up leaning forward, not engaging our hamstrings, and landing on a bent knee instead of a straight one, says biomechanist Katy Bowman. This puts excess pressure on the front of your thighs instead of the back of your legs—your hamstrings and the muscles around your hips—where it belongs.

To offset some of the strain, try rolling your body beforehand with therapy balls, foam rollers, or other self-massage tools, Miller suggests. You can also prep your body with a dynamic warm-up, including moves like bodyweight squats, lunges, and forward folds. Afterward, stretch your hamstrings.

3. Walking may help you manage a wide range of diseases.

Think of just about any health benefit you've ever heard you could get through exercise, and chances are there's research showing walking may help get you there. In one small 2016 study published in *Creative Nursing*, just 10 weeks of walking 20 minutes per day improved women's blood pressure, cholesterol, and other measures of heart health.

If you do have an illness or chronic condition, walking is often more accessible (and sometimes more palatable) than other forms of exercise. And it still brings big benefits—for instance, improved function and reduced fatigue during breast cancer treatment, better blood sugar control (when done after eating) if you have diabetes, and improved quality of life if you're a cancer patient or survivor.

4. Walking can improve your balance.

In her physical therapy practice, Dr. Folden sees many patients who have fallen—and it's not just a problem for older adults, as some of them are in their 20s and 30s. "We're not always mindful of changes in our balance and our coordination," she says, and falls that cause injuries can sideline you and increase your risk of disability.

For as simple as it seems, walking not only builds strength, but it also places a significant challenge on your brain and nervous system, improving your ability to stay upright. "That reciprocal movement with your arms and legs as you're navigating different terrain like concrete, grass, gravel, and stuff in the road—being able to negotiate and navigate that is vital to maintaining long-term health and wellness," Dr. Folden says.

5. Incline walking can offer an even bigger payoff.

To maximize some of these perks, find a hill to stride up and down, or crank up the incline on your treadmill. Attacking elevation works your ankles, knees, and hips in a different way, further enhancing the positive feedback loop between your muscles and your brain and strengthening the muscles that prevent us from falling, Dr. Folden says.

It also stretches out your calves and Achilles tendon—the tough cord at the back of your heel—which are common sites of injury. "Your muscles are like rubber bands; you get a brand new pack of rubber bands, you can stretch it from one side of the room to the other, and it's fine. But if you sit that rubber band on your desk for a year, 10 years, 15 years, when you go to stretch it, more than likely it's going to pop," she says. "Our muscles need that constant lubrication and movement."

Finally, heading uphill offers an even bigger cardio boost. "Your heart is also a muscle, and making it work harder is how you train it to pump better," Dr. Folden says. As long as you don't have any

cardiac issues, a little heavy breathing as you ascend will improve your cardiovascular endurance in the long run. (If you do, you should talk with your doctor before starting any different kind of exercise.)

6. Walking can be a great way to catch up with friends and family.

Connection matters—in fact, loneliness has also been called an epidemic, and it's been linked to a shorter life. “One aspect of our physical health that's often overlooked is our need for others,” Bowman says.

Throughout the course of the pandemic, we've learned outdoors is always safer than indoors—so a walk with friends can serve double duty, offering a much-needed chance to catch up while you also get fresh air and exercise. You can also take your kids along, as Amshoff does; Folden frequently walks her son seven blocks to the playground, meaning they both get physical activity and some time to bond.

7. Walking can bolster your mental health.

Moving your body can help shift your mindset in a big way. In one 2018 study of 66 young adults published in *Health Promotion Perspectives*, a single 10-minute walk led to significant improvement in their self-reported moods.

While many people with mental health conditions like anxiety or depression are often told to “just work out!”—something which can be annoying and unhelpful, since in many cases that's not enough to treat the conditions—there *is* research to suggest that physical activity can be one element amid a broader group of habits that can be helpful. In fact, according to a recent research review of 55 published papers in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, “there may be sufficient evidence to promote walking to prevent and treat these conditions.”

Setting a goal to walk, and then doing it, also boosts something called self-efficacy, Leeja Carter, Ph.D., assistant professor of sport and exercise psychology at Long Island University–Brooklyn, tells SELF. It's a belief in yourself that, with time, further improves your health and well-being, she says: “Following through with that—being like, ‘I actually did it’—can give you a deep sense of confidence about what you can do and how you can do it, and that you could potentially do it again tomorrow.”

8. Walking provides connection with nature.

Along with boosting creativity, walking in a park or near a body of water can make you feel more centered. When compared to a jaunt along a busy road, forest walking had significantly greater psychological benefits, according to a North-western University study of 38 participants. Another larger study, in the aptly named journal *Ecopsychology*, found group nature walks were linked to fewer depressive symptoms, less stress, and an overall brighter mood.

Of course, as we mentioned above, not all people have access to safe, green conditions to walk. But, in some good news, studies show even watching nature videos has positive effects on your emotions, so cueing up a forest walk on YouTube could help even if you're stuck indoors.

9. Walking can help you bond with your pooch.

The average dog owner walks an extra 22 minutes per day, a small British study of 43 pairs of dog owners and non-dog owners found. That's enough to reap health benefits for you *and* your pup—walking also helps your pet's joints, digestion, weight, and behaviour. Plus, it's just plain fun, too, and a great way to spend some quality time with your dog, whether you're one of the many who adopted a pandemic puppy or are just getting some extra one-on-one time with your loyal family pet.

Depending on the dog, you might walk more slowly than you would on your own. But if you want to bring in a little more intensity to your dog walk, you can amp it up by doing bodyweight movements—think squats, lunges, or jumping jacks—while your canine companion stops for potty breaks.

10. Walking might help ease your eye pain.

When you stare at a screen all day, your range of focus narrows to the few feet in front of you. This fatigues the muscles that help the eye focus, contributing to digital eyestrain. While this usually doesn't harm your vision in the long run, it can contribute to symptoms such as headaches, sore eyes, and blurred vision.

Strolling outdoors, however, "requires that you use long-range vision, as well as constant scaling of obstacles or terrain out in front of you and on either side," Miller says. The more often you observe what's going on in the wider world, the better your brain and eyes work together to process it, according to a small 2019 study in *PLoS Biology*.

11. Walking is low-key enough to squeeze into a busy day.

Unlike other exercises, you might not get sweaty—so you don't always have to schedule a shower between that and your workday. If you're working from home, it offers a welcome escape, either for a quick midday break or as a way to start or end the workday. And you might not even need to change clothes. Just swap your slippers or work shoes for well-fitting walking or running shoes, she says.

You can also use brisk walking to run errands or as a warm-up before another physical endeavour, whether that's another workout or a manual task like gardening. Or, multitask with audiobooks or phone calls, or listen to business podcasts while you walk.

However, there's also a huge benefit to, at least sometimes, turning off all your inputs and simply giving yourself silence and space.

12. ...Or it can be cranked up a notch.

Walking counts as exercise nearly any way you do it. However, it's helpful to designate your main purpose beforehand, Lewis says. If you're mainly looking to unplug, leave the technology at home and don't push the pace.

On the flip side, there are ample ways to add some intensity and turn your walks into a walking workout. Besides inclines, as mentioned above, you can also do some walking-based intervals—walk faster for one minute, then slower for two, on repeat. Or put on your favourite playlist and walk easy on the verses, faster on the chorus, suggests Jenna Stern, a Philadelphia-based trainer and founder of the body-positive online fitness studio The Philasophy, who found herself walking more after a running injury temporarily sidelined her early in the pandemic. You can also try a weighted vest, or stop every half mile and do a bodyweight circuit.