



Tips To Increase Daily Walking

We hear the “10,000 steps a day” edict so frequently it’s become borderline annoying. It’s amusing to learn that this recommendation is completely unsubstantiated by science. It was conjured by a Japanese pedometer company for a 1960s marketing campaign, because the Japanese character for “10,000” looks like a walking figure. That’s it! What’s more, actually accumulating 10,000 steps a day (that’s around five miles of walking) can be intimidating for many, so we might be better off pursuing fitness goals one step at a time. 10,000 steps is great, and so is 5,000—especially if you typically only take 2,000 or 3,000. The following suggestions can help you build new walking habits that feel natural, comfortable, and easy to maintain for a lifetime.



Morning stroll: Resolve to make locomotion your first act of the day, before getting pulled into mobile technology or household chores. Make the walk short enough so you are able to make a sincere commitment and keep to it. Even if it’s only five minutes to the street corner and back, if you can establish his habit, you may soon find yourself walking for 15 minutes. Getting morning exposure to direct outdoor light also helps entrain your circadian rhythm. You’ll get a natural burst of energy and hormone optimization, and also set yourself up to fall asleep gracefully later that evening.

Honor your dog: Dog owners, honor yourself and your original commitment to care for an animal by getting out for a morning and/or evening walk every day. Dogs love routines. Leash up at the same time every day, and your dog will come to expect an outing with great anticipation and excitement, on cue at the exact time of day. This, in turn, gives you the most fantastic accountability partner imaginable. Don’t worry about the weather, your fatigue or stress levels, or the great show on TV. Do it for the sake of the dog!



Orchestrated obligatory walking: It may seem silly at first, but start orchestrating situations where you have to walk to your destination.

- Park your car a half-mile away from school and walk the kids in. You'll save time avoiding the drop-off and pick-up lines, and model lifelong healthy behaviors
- Enter large parking lots at the mall, grocery, or big box store, head to the furthest spots from the store, and hoof it to the entrance.
- Exit the subway one stop prior to your usual stop and enjoy strolling the extra distance to the office or home.
- Stop at a park on your commute home, complete a lap, and resume your commute.
- If you work or live in a tall building, make a habit of taking the stairs for the final five, ten, or twenty floors to your destination. If you live and/or work in a low-rise, swear off the elevator and make the three-flight climb and descent mandatory from here on out. Descending stairs is great for preserving balance and building bone density.

Walking during the workday: Resolve to get up and move for a minute or two after every 20 minutes of focused cognitive work, and take longer breaks every two hours—at least five minutes and occasionally longer. You'll return to your desk with more energy and cognitive power, guaranteed. If you feel too slammed to take the time, realize that your brain will work better and faster when you take regular breaks. To help your progress, program screen reminders, post sticky notes, or even leave important items in your car so you're forced to retrieve them at some point. Resolve to take phone calls and in-person meetings on the move whenever possible. If you're in a management position, lead by example by moving around the office frequently and being seen doing so. Encourage your team to take short breaks in the name of productivity and health.



Recovery walks: Emerging research suggests that gentle movement can actually speed recovery in comparison to complete rest. Walking and other low-level activities have been shown to trigger a boost in parasympathetic activity, increase heart rate variability, improve oxygen delivery, boost blood circulation, boost lymphatic function, speed the removal of waste products in fatigued muscles, and generate anti-inflammatory benefits. Make a special effort to increase movement at times when you feel stiff, sore, or fatigued, such as taking longer walks the day after your most strenuous workouts.

Injury rehab: Even acute injuries that have been traditionally treated with rest and immobilization are now treated with walking and mobility exercises. Forward-thinking physical therapy and rehabilitation experts, including Dr. Kelly Starrett, have departed from the long-standing acute injury treatment protocol of RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) in favor of *ECM* (Elevate, Compress, Move). Elevation and compression enhance the function of the circulatory and lymphatic systems to remove waste products and keep the inflammatory response under control, while movement increases blood flow, oxygen delivery, and mobility of injured joints and tissue. Obviously, walking on a sprained ankle can feel unpleasant, but this type of light activity can often speed healing and prevent atrophy in comparison to total rest.

Stress management: Try walking as a therapeutic practice when you are experiencing an emotional disturbance of any kind. The research is conclusive that walking will spur an instant change in blood chemistry to make you feel calmer, less stressed, less emotional, and more energized. These benefits are especially impactful when you walk in nature. Granted, you will probably not have the urge to take a stroll when you are experiencing a negative emotional charge, so this is another situation where making a deliberate choice is essential. You're still allowed to be angry, sad, or frustrated, just do it on the move.

After-dinner stroll: Research shows that a short, comfortably-paced walk after meals can have a profound impact on glucose regulation. Even during gentle movement, the muscles will pull glucose out of the bloodstream that might otherwise linger there and prompt an insulin spike. The postprandial (after-meal) glucose spike typically peaks around one hour after eating, so be sure to get moving within that one-hour time window. Research from New Zealand suggests that effects are most prominent after the evening meal, as this is when people typically become inactive. Even a 10-minute after-dinner stroll has been shown to lower blood glucose by 22 percent among diabetics. Keep the effort light, as vigorous exercise after a meal can interfere with the digestive process, whereas casual walking aids digestion by stimulating peristalsis, the movement of material through the digestive system.

Evening stroll: Consider making a brief stroll part of your evening wind-down ritual before going to bed. Perhaps you can establish a rule to walk immediately after you finish your screen engagement for the evening? Getting outdoors into fresh evening air, cooler temperatures, and a dark environment supports important hormonal processes that promote sleepiness and a smooth transition into a good night's sleep. The same is true for a canine, so grab that leash and take at least a short stroll no matter what!