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## SPECIAL ISSUE: WALKING IN L.A.

### Here's how to get started

**It's easy. And with fitness clubs and races, keeping up the routine will be doable.**

By Regina Nuzzo

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WANT to walk? Don't, at present, do much of it? Here are some tips on how, when and where to put one foot in front of the other.

- **The basics:** To reap walking's benefits, you don't have to redline your heart rate but you can't be a slugged about it, either. The goal is to get your active metabolic rate between 3 and 6 times your resting rate. For most people, that means walking between 3 and 4 mph, says Mark Fenton, a walking trainer and author of "The Complete Guide to Walking for Health, Weight Loss, and Fitness." "It's not race-walking, but it's not window-shopping, either."

Not sure if your pace is on target? Try timing yourself at a track or on a treadmill at the gym to see what 3.5 mph feels like, says Steven Blair, professor of exercise science at the University of South Carolina. Your brain will be surprisingly good at recognizing how intense that effort feels, and then gauging the speed of your other walks.

- **Walk, but for how long?** Ten-minute chunks at a time are fine — but you'll build even more endurance by sustaining a longer bout. And remember that "30 minutes or more a day" is only a minimum recommendation. ("Most people don't hear the 'or more' part," says David Bassett, professor of exercise, sport and leisure studies at the University of Tennessee and coauthor of "Pedometer Walking: Stepping Your Way to Health, Weight Loss, and Fitness." To get better health benefits, see if you can occasionally walk longer.
- **How to walk:** You may think you already know how to walk, but the finer points can help you get more from a workout, Fenton says. During his clinics, he gives pointers for better walking form: stand tall (slouching makes for bad walking); take quick steps (not shorter steps, just a faster stride); bend your arms at the elbow (this allows them to swing freely with less effort); and push off from your toes, as if "you're showing someone behind the sole of your shoe" (which engages more leg muscles).
- **To spice up your routine:** Try walking intervals, suggests Guy Le Masurier, professor of physical education at Malaspina University in British Columbia, Canada.

Warm up for five to 10 minutes, he says, "then walk like you're late for the bus" for anywhere between 30 seconds to two minutes. Slow back down for another 30 seconds to two minutes, then repeat. Start with three intervals and play around with the duration and intensity until it feels right.

After you've mastered various paces, find new terrain to turn up the challenge, Fenton recommends. Hills are ideal, but walking on sand or snow or in waist-high water can also create extra resistance and boost the intensity of

your walk.

Throughout the week, you can easily mix approaches, Fenton adds. For example, for two days a week, get in at least an hour of walking — "the big calorie burner." Then, for the couple of days in which you're really pressed for time, do a 20-minute high-intensity blast. On the other days, accumulate 30 minutes of regular intensity however you can: taking the stairs, parking farther away or walking after dinner.

- **When you want more:** If your heart thrills to stiff competition and you still want to hang on to walking's low-impact benefits, try walking a road race instead of running it. "This isn't namby-pamby walking, though," Fenton says. First get your 5K(3.1 miles) time down to 37 minutes — that's an average of 5 mph, or as fast as a slow jogger would be. Next, shoot for finishing a 10K race (6.2 miles) in 90 minutes, Fenton suggests.

- **And then, even more:** Consider taking on a half-marathon (13.1 miles), aiming to finish in three hours and 15 or 20 minutes. It may not be all-out race walking (that's "too silly-looking" for most people, says Fenton, a former race walker himself), but it's nonetheless an impressive feat of speed and endurance.

Several national marathons allow walking: About 3,000 walkers crossed the finish line in this year's Los Angeles Marathon on March 4, second only in the number of walkers to the Honolulu Marathon.

The L.A. Roadrunners has a special marathon walking team that will start training you months before the event, helping you to finish injury free — and perhaps even faster than some runners, says Bob Hickey, the group's walking coach. (Times range from just under 5 1/2 hours to more than eight hours.)

- **Make friends:** If you're looking for lighthearted walking companionship, check out one of the 350 local American Volkssport Assns. Originally a German concept ("volkssport" means "people's sport," and was coined in the 1960s as the common folks' reaction to the elitism of competitive sports), "volkswalking" in the U.S. refers to people of various ages gathering for an organized 5K or 10K walk through parks or scenic routes. Everyone who finishes is a winner, no matter how long it takes.

Themed walks are common with these groups: Examples include California historical trails or the Sacramento club's ever-popular "International Talk Like a Pirate Day Walk."

"You're not going to walk and get fit if it's not fun," says Steve Hughart, president of the Sacramento club.

- **If you're a senior:** How much activity seniors should get is still open for debate. Roger Fielding, director of the nutrition, exercise physiology and sarcopenia laboratory at Tufts University, recommends aiming for 30 minutes most days a week — eventually. Find a partner or a group to walk with, he says: Not only is it more fun to be social while walking, you also have someone to help keep you safe. Build up your endurance slowly, with frequent breaks if needed.

- **If you're trying to lose weight:** Thirty minutes of daily walking might not be enough; most people also need to change their diet. How walking can really help is in maintenance after you've shed.

"The people who have been most successful at keeping weight off are those who engage in physical activity like walking," says James Hill, director of the human nutrition center at the University of Colorado and coauthor of "The Step Diet: Count Steps, Not Calories to Lose Weight and Keep It Off Forever."

If you feel intimidated by the idea of 30 straight minutes of walking, start at whatever level you find yourself, Hill suggests. "Walk for five minutes today; tomorrow try to go to six. The biggest mistake is to go out and try to run three miles, end up feeling awful, and then drop the entire thing."

The Institute of Medicine and the U.S. Department of Agriculture now recommend 30 to 60 minutes a day of

moderate physical activity to prevent unhealthy weight gain, and 60 to 90 minutes to maintain weight loss for people who have already lost weight — although some scientists say there is too little evidence to back up the recommendations.

New guidelines based on the latest science will be available from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services in 2008.

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