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## How To Structure Your Walking Program

You want to walk to improve your health, but you are unsure on how much walking you need to do to be in the shape and fitness you want to be in. It can be quite confusing to know how to set up the type of walking program you need to perform regularly. The information below will look into what you need to consider in order to gain the benefits you are looking for from your walking program.

You need to consider the three main variables to any walking program you can modify:

- Frequency
- Intensity
- Time

Frequency is the number of times you work out per week. Of course, the more often you work out, the more calories you will burn because you are doing the activity (i.e. walking as an exercise routine) more often per week.

Therefore, you should consider what benefits you want to gain from your walking workouts and how quickly you want to achieve them. This will help you determine how often you should be doing walking workouts each week.

If you just want the benefits of lower cholesterol, protection from heart disease, and increased energy levels, then walking fewer times per week can help you achieve these goals.

However, if you want to lose weight via walking, you must be willing to do it more often, because it is key to burn off the food you are eating. You have to burn off the food you eat each day and additional calories to achieve weight loss. Only doing walking workouts occasionally will not achieve this more difficult goal.

What will also play a role in how you structure your walking workouts is the intensity at which you walk. Intensity refers to how hard you are working while you are walking. To know how hard you are really working while walking, there are three tests:

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1. Heart rate
2. RPE scale
3. Talk test

Your heart rate is the most precise rate in order to measure the intensity of your walks. You want to achieve a specific target heart-rate zone, depending upon what type of walking you are doing. To determine your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220.

If you're lifestyle walking, you want to hit a target heart-rate zone between 50 to 60 percent of your maximum heart rate. For fitness walking, you want to hit a target heart-rate zone between 60 to 75 percent of your maximum heart rate. Then if you're high-energy walking, you want to hit a target heart-rate zone between 75 to 95 percent of your maximum heart rate.

Your RPE, or rating of perceived exertion, will give you an overall sense of how hard you're working. It is scored on a scale of 1 to 10. A rating of 1 is considered to be really easy, while a rating of 10 is considered to be the most difficult or extreme possible. Lifestyle walking should be between a 4 to 6, fitness walking should be 6 to 8, and high-energy walking should be between 8 to 9.5.

The talk test involves talking while you're walking. If you're doing a lifestyle walk, you should be able to do a slightly breathy conversation. A fitness walk should only allow you to offer brief moments of breathless conversation. A high-energy walking workout should not really allow you to speak at all, outside of maybe a breathless word or two here and there.

The third main factor you can adjust in your walking workout is the time you spend walking. This factor will be influenced by many things:

**Frequency** – Do you wish to do all of your weekly walking in one long workout or broken up into shorter segments?

**Intensity** – The harder you work, the less time you will be able to endure the exercise, and vice versa.

**Schedule** – How busy are you to put in the time?

**Fitness Level** – Your current fitness level will determine how long you will be

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able to endure doing the exercise.

**Goals** – Are you just walking for your health, or are you planning to walk (or even run) a marathon?

By considering the three main factors of frequency, intensity, and time, you will be able to mold your walking workouts accordingly in order to gain the benefits you want to gain. Some of these factors will be determined by your goals, how much time you have to put in, and how hard you want to work during each workout. By carefully evaluating your lifestyle, your schedule, and your goals, you can tailor the perfect walking workout for you to achieve the goals you want to achieve.

## Starting Your Own Walking Group

You really want to get into walking because you've heard and read that walking can be great for your health, as well as a great way to get into and stay in shape. However, you really don't want to walk alone for varying reasons. This includes those that range from safety reasons to just wanting to have someone to talk and walk with while doing your workout. Walking with another person will help to encourage you to keep walking for the long term. If you can't join a walking club for one reason or another, starting your own walking group may be a great option for you.

You may have checked out your local area to see if there were any walking clubs, but you may have either found none or none that suited you. If those clubs don't walk often enough or don't do enough of the activities you want at the times you wish to do them, you may wish to consider starting your own club to walk regularly.

Starting your own club will be much more successful and enduring if you determine what niche you can fill with your club. For instance, there may be local clubs in your area that only walk once a week and just take a stroll around the block. You may want something more challenging, and others may want something more challenging too.

Therefore, you may want to consider forming a club that walks two to three times per week, and walks from your neighborhood to the local shopping center that is

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a few streets over and back again. You could even consider adding a few shopping trips as part of your weekly walks (after all, you'll be walking in the stores too).

You will want to recruit members for your new club. Ask your current walking friends if they wish to join your new club. You should start asking around to see who wants to become officers of the club and committee chairpersons – this will help to give your new club shape.

Once you have established your club's "board," you want to grow your membership by advertising in places where many walkers frequent. This can include athletic shoe stores, schools, local parks, health clubs, senior centers, medical centers, and religious organizations.

Put up flyers in these locations; ensure that they have contact information for the members of the board, as well as a website address (whether it's a full-blown website, a blog on Blogger or WordPress, etc.). When you are walking with your club, be sure to have business cards on hand that advertise your club and provide the relevant information so that you can pass out these cards to people you meet and to those who have questions about your club and show interest in joining it.

As you can see, you have some research to do before you decide whether to create your own walking group or not. You have to decide if you want it to be part of a larger organization or a brand new club. You have to recruit people to become board members. You have to determine what qualities make up your club (such as how often you will walk, what makes your club different from other local clubs in the area, etc.). You also have to recruit new members and advertise to grow your membership. By taking these factors into account, you can lay the groundwork that will be necessary to form a walking club that will be fun and that will last long into the future.

## **Indoor Walking**

If you want to gain the health benefits of walking, but are dismayed because you live in a climate that is too hot or too cold for your liking, don't fret, as you can always do indoor walking. Indoor walking is just like it sounds – walking indoors. There are several ways to walk indoors, some of which we will look at it below.

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One good way to enjoy indoor walking is via a treadmill. Treadmills are usually the preferred choice for walkers who wish to do indoor walking because of weather, humidity, or some other reason (such as wanting to watch a favorite program on television at the same time).

It's easy to begin walking on a treadmill; you just turn it on, hop aboard, and begin walking (or jogging if you really feel ambitious). There are usually handrails on most treadmills; while you can hold onto those, you will get a better workout and more health benefits if you choose to not hold onto the handrails while on the treadmill. After all, you don't hold onto handrails while you are walking outdoors, right?

One of the best ways to utilize your treadmill is to work on your walking posture while on it. You should work on the heel strike of your gait, rolling through each step. This is a great way to improve your gait, as you can control the speed of the treadmill, plus you don't have to worry about sidewalk cracks, other people, or any other obstacles. Just focus on improving your gait.

One of the major disadvantages of walking on a treadmill is that it can become pretty boring pretty quickly, as you just walk on it. Fortunately, there are ways to improve upon the boredom factor. Positioning the treadmill in front of the television is one way; another way is to have your MP3 or CD player handy to play some music. You could also use your Smartphone to play music or even a movie or television show, thus removing much of the boredom involved in walking on a treadmill constantly.

Walking on indoor tracks is another option for indoor walking. Some health facilities and gyms offer such tracks for walkers to use for their workouts. Again, you can work on improving your gait without having to worry about sidewalk cracks, other pedestrians, and weather conditions using an indoor track.

However, just as with treadmills, the routine can become monotonous quickly, which is why having an MP3 player, portable CD player, or Smartphone handy can make your walking workouts much more enjoyable on an indoor track.

You can walk the halls and stairs in your home, office, or school as an alternative option. Instead of taking the elevator in your office or school, take the stairs to gain the health benefits of walking up and down an incline. This is especially a good option when you need to traverse between one to three levels of floors, as

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doing more may slow you down from your work or school duties.

As you can see, there are plenty of indoor walking options for you to consider when you can't readily walk outside due to weather, unsafe conditions, or a busy schedule. Indoor walking can be convenient, but also monotonous after a short period of time, which is why an MP3 player, portable CD player, or Smartphone can become a great companion during your indoor walking workouts.

By considering the advantages and shortfalls of indoor walking workouts, you can work them into your exercise routines and gain the healthful benefits without boring yourself and losing your drive to continue walking regularly.

## **Mall Walking**

You want to take up walking to enjoy the health benefits you can gain from it. However, if you live in a cold-weather climate, with cold, harsh winters, then walking outside in these conditions can be treacherous, especially when the sidewalks haven't been shoveled. Does this mean you have to give up walking for the winter? No, not if you take up mall walking.

"What is mall walking?" you ask. Mall walking is just as it sounds, walking through the mall. Many malls open early just for walkers, as they can walk through the mall with minimal traffic from those who are primarily there to shop.

In addition, there are several advantages to doing mall walking. You're out of the weather and in a nice, climate-controlled atmosphere. As a result, you can dress comfortably and not have to worry about snow and cold, or even rain and heat. Essentially, it's the ideal conditions for a walking workout. Plus, you don't have to worry about traffic at intersections, fumes from auto exhausts, bushes, broken glass, and other hazards you may find outside.

In addition, you'll feel more secure, as there are other people around, including mall security. You don't necessarily have to walk with friends when you are mall walking (though you can still do that too). Additionally, you'll have access to bathrooms and water fountains in the event of nature calls or if you get thirsty.

Many malls will also provide other advantages for walkers. These include discounts, health check-ups, walking clubs, and mileage rewards. A walking club

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or program is usually sponsored by a local medical center, and it's usually free to join.

You can often find more information about such a club at a mall information kiosk. You'll usually receive a visor, t-shirt, or pin to identify yourself when you join such a club. Besides identifying yourself, it will often make you eligible for discounts from specific merchants, rewards for the miles you have walked, and product giveaways. You're also bound to make new friends amongst other mall walkers as well, since you will likely see them often and even walk together with them at the mall.

However, there are some disadvantages to mall walking you should be aware of. The walks will likely become monotonous over time, as you'll be passing through the same areas after a brief period, since the mall is only so large and only has so many paths. In addition, mall walking doesn't lend itself to much challenge, as you can only walk so fast at a mall, especially when it becomes busier with other walkers and shoppers. Therefore, if you are planning to build up your endurance and increase your speed, mall walking is probably not for you.

Mall walking can be beneficial for those who live in extreme cold or hot weather climates and want a more controlled atmosphere. Additionally, it is for those who can't easily join groups and want more security than walking outside alone.

However, for those who want more scenic routes and a greater challenge when it comes to the pace of walking, mall walking isn't the best choice. By considering what you want from your walking workouts, you can consider whether adding mall walking to your walking workouts would be best for you or not.

## **Power Walking**

So you want to enjoy the health benefits of walking, but would also like to burn more fat if possible. Fortunately, there is a great way to increase the amount of fat you burn by walking, specifically, by power walking.

Power walking (also known as "speed walking") is walking at a faster, more athletic pace. It takes a little bit of practice to be able to walk effectively at a faster pace, but the health benefits make this practice worth it. Additionally, if you carry a large amount of weight, power walking actually puts less strain on

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your joints than jogging because you hit the ground with less than half of the force. Thus, it's actually safer to power walk for those who are overweight than it is to jog.

To do successful power walking, you need some good walking shoes, as this is a moderate-impact aerobic activity. When the shoe bends, it should yield easily at the ball of the foot. You should make sure that there is some space between your toe and the end of the shoe. You do not want your shoes too tight or too stiff, as you'll be feeling achy joints and tingling toes not long into your workout.

You have to practice improving your pace to successfully power walk. To burn the most calories possible during a power walk, aim to walk at about a 4.5-mile per hour pace.

Fitness scientists at Washington University in St. Louis determined that you can burn almost as many calories by power walking at this pace as you can by jogging at this same speed. A 140-pound woman was able to burn 201 calories per 30 minutes power walking at this speed, while burning 223 calories per 30 minutes by jogging at this speed.

Note that if you haven't been walking regularly, it will be hard to hit 4.5 miles per hour, as this is a fast walk. Thus, you need to work your way up to it, both to endure such a pace, plus to minimize the chance of injury from doing it. Start at a slower pace of speed, but utilize the same power walking form, (swinging your arms while walking) in order to gain calorie-burning power from doing a power walk at a slower speed.

Determine your current pace by walking your local high school running track (usually one-quarter of a mile) or measure a mile and then walk it. If you complete the mile in 20 minutes, that's equivalent to a 3-mile-per-hour gait; doing it in 15 minutes results in a 4-mile-per-hour gait, while doing it in 13 minutes results in a 4.5-mile-per-hour gait. No matter what your speed, continue walking regularly; over time, your gait will start to pick up, and you'll be able to pick up your pace to where you can achieve that 4.5-mile-per-hour gait (or even faster).

As you can see, power walking can be a great way to gain the health benefits from walking. While also boosting the fat-burning power you can gain from walking. In fact, the fat-burning power is nearly equivalent to that of jogging,

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while power walking is easier on your joints. It takes time to reach the optimal 4.5-mile-per-hour gait that nearly equates the fat-burning power of power walking with jogging. With the proper time and effort at a slower pace, you can achieve that fast gait and gain all of the health benefits and fat-burning power from power walking.