

Get on Your Feet – 30 Minutes of Walking Each Day has Health Benefits

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association suggests the following five **S.M.A.R.T.** Walking tips: **Stretch, Move, Add it up, Reduce Strain, Talk to a physiotherapist**

STRETCH – A warm up and cool down is vital to every walking program. Keep muscles flexible and relaxed, joints mobile, and relieve tension and strain by doing a few gentle stretches before and after your walk. Important areas to stretch are the neck, shoulder, arms, low back and spine, hip flexors, buttocks, quads, hamstrings, shins, calves and ankles. Stretch until you feel tension but not pain. Do not bounce as this can tear the muscle fibres.

MOVE TODAY FOR TOMORROW – Walking is one of the healthiest activities to help gain and maintain physical mobility. The body was designed with balance in mind and if you somehow walk out of balance, you are placing added stress on the parts of your body that have to compensate in order to keep you upright. With good posture you will be able to breathe easier and avoid back pain. Use the following tips to keep your body in line and add more power to your step.

- Focus on keeping your shoulders square and relaxed;
- Focus on achieving an efficient stride; not too long, not too short;
- Find and maintain a consistent, comfortable pace;
- Maintain a tall erect posture, keeping your torso upright;
- Focus on keeping your breathing relaxed;
- Think about arm swing, driving your arms backwards, not just forwards;
- Foot strike is key; pay attention to actively pushing off, rolling from the heel right through and off the end of the toe;
- Focus on pointing your feet straight ahead

ADD IT UP, AN HOUR IS POWER – Adding up the time spent doing particular activities, along with pacing and rotating them frequently, eases tension to strained muscles. Start slow and build up your walking routine. Planning and pacing are very important. Don't over exert yourself. With proper clothing, you can walk, hike and snowshoe 12 months of the year.

In spring and summer, drink water or sports drink before, during and after your walk to ensure proper hydration.

In fall and winter wear a hat to minimize heat loss and dress in layers.

REDUCE STRAIN – walking shoes, waist pouches, backpacks, etc., are meant to ease the load, not cause additional strain to your body. Take measures to fit the gear to you, not you to the gear.

- Shop around for the right shoe.
- Replace old shoes. The average life of a walking shoe is approximately 400 – 600 miles (620 – 800 km)

- Monitor your posture and body mechanics. Make sure your head, shoulders and hips are lined up over your feet;
- Keep your stride comfortable. Too long a stride makes for an “over stride” – muscles tighten up and tire before your walk is over.
- Rotate your walking routes from incline to flat, sidewalk to grass, to keep it interesting and avoiding over-use injuries.
- Don’t use wrist or ankle weights while walking as they put too much added stress on your joints.
- Drink lots of fluids and be careful of overheating or dehydrating during activity.
- Listen to your body and watch for recurring or persisting pain – if concerned, seek early professional attention from a physiotherapist.

TALK TO A PHYSIOTHERAPIST – Physiotherapists are the mobility experts for both the fit person who requires specific fitness and injury prevention advice, and for the elderly, injured or disabled person who has specific needs and considerations. With their applied knowledge and understanding of the human body in action, physiotherapists are able to help you to increase mobility, relieve pain, build strength, and improve balance and cardiovascular function. A physiotherapist will assess your injury and provide appropriate treatment that will promote an earlier return to your walking program as well as advice on how to prevent recurrence of injury.

* Info taken from the Canadian Physical Therapy Association Website.