



# Ramp up your walking

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**When someone tells you to** “take a walk” they may just be giving good advice for fitness and health (and that is how we

will interpret it here). But is that all there is to it?

Actually, walking is one of the most accessible and ideal methods for getting fitter and improving your health. All you need is a comfortable pair of shoes or sneakers and a place to do it. Simple so far, but is it enough? While any walking is good, those who get the most benefit from the activity are those who walk faster.

We have all seen race walking, that Olympic sport where people walk on straight legs and look a bit like ducks. It might look funny, but it is a demanding sport. However, we are not suggesting you take up race walking (but don't let us stop you, either). Instead, try walking faster. That's it. Work up your speed to get more benefits.

Speed walking, or power walking, is really just more effective walking as fitness. As you pick up speed, the extra effort builds up the cardiovascular workout and burns more calories. Add in arm swings and both ramp up. As speed increases, more muscles get involved in the arms, legs and ankles.

An average brisk walk will cover one kilometer in about 10 minutes. The same distance for a power walker would be about 7.5 minutes; and a speed walker would cover it in just over six minutes. Building up your speed is simple enough. Start with good posture: chin up, head level and back straight. Add in arm swings with elbows bent at 90 degrees, held close to your body and your fists closed, but not clenched. As you take a step, strike

the ground with the heel, toes up. Rotating your hips reduces side-to-side motion so propulsion is focussed forward, adding speed and power — this will come as your speed builds up. Also, take smaller steps instead of big strides. This will improve both your speed and fitness.

For most of us, getting started can be the biggest challenge; and then keeping going. Success means taking the right steps (pun intended) toward your success.

For someone who has not been physically active in a while, start our walking only 10 or 15 minutes at a time. Don't worry too much about speed yet so as to protect against injuries to muscles and joints. Slowly build up both duration and intensity until you are walking 30 minutes a day (build up to it), the build up your walking speed.

At all levels of ability, make your walk more effective

by varying your routine. Carry a weighted backpack one day; do hills another; use walking poles; do some interval training by alternating fast and

slower pacing. And a great way to encourage your success is to walk with a partner or a group.

Getting out for a walk is always a good idea — there is no downside. At the very least, try to build up your speed so your kilometre comes in under 10 minutes (4 mph by the way) as a good goal. That should be the minimum, but it is a good start. You don't have to be a race walker with all the hip action and rigid legs, but getting out to walk is always going to do good.

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