

Starting a *Walking Works* Program

The U.S. Surgeon General reports that a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, such as brisk walking on most days of the week can produce long-term health benefits. The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports recommends at least 30 minutes a day, on five or more days a week, or 10,000 steps daily, measured by a pedometer. Walking Works is designed for everyone, so even if you have a chronic health condition, or are seriously overweight, or if you are already in great shape, you will learn how to set a goal that makes sense for you.

10,000 steps may seem like a lot, but you're probably walking more than you think. And, by making simple choices like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, walking to the store instead of driving, parking at the back of the parking lot instead of the front – you'll be surprised at how quickly the steps add up. Add 30 to 60 minutes of brisk-paced walking a day and you're there.

Your *Walking Works* Plan

To avoid injury, it is important to start out slowly. Unless you are already walking a lot, it may take a while before you reach the 10,000 steps goal. Follow these steps to establish your individual goal and shape your program:

1. **Baseline** – If you are using a pedometer, count your steps for seven days; if you don't have a pedometer, follow the recommendations of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports – begin with 30 minutes of brisk-paced walking at least five days each week. Keep a log to track the amount of daily walking activity you are currently doing. This will establish your baseline. Include all of your normal walking activities, such as walking up the stairs at home, walking to work, etc. At the end of the day, tally your total steps in the walking log. If you are not using a pedometer, keep track of the minutes you spend walking.
2. **Benchmark** – Your benchmark is the highest number of steps you walked on any given day while establishing your baseline the first week. Use that number as your daily goal for the second and third weeks. Log your daily walks, and at the end of the third week, review your log. If you average your goal, add another 500 steps or several more minutes to your daily goals for the fourth and fifth weeks.
3. **Build** – At the end of each two-week period, try to add 500 steps or several more minutes to your walking goal. If you had difficulty reaching your goal, walk at the same level until you build enough endurance to increase your target. Continue to log your activity to prevent slipping back or dropping out. If you find yourself falling behind your average daily goal, try not to become discouraged. To maintain your motivation, keep logging your progress and stay with the same number of steps or minutes instead of increasing your target.

Keep in mind that 10,000 steps may not be a realistic goal for everyone. If you are very overweight or have other chronic health problems, talk with your doctor to determine a goal that may be more appropriate.

Is 10,000 Steps Too Few For You?

For some people, 10,000 steps are too few to meet ultimate health or weight loss goals. For example, individuals who are already walking 7,000 or 8,000 steps per day may not get enough benefit from increasing to just 10,000. If this applies to you, ultimately aim to add a total of 7,600 steps to your current daily total, adding 500 steps every two weeks as indicated in the plan. You can also add hills, stairs or arm weights to your routine to make your walks more challenging.