

# Walking for healthy ageing



## The benefits of walking

Walking is an excellent way to gently exercise your body and add some physical activity to your day. You could find daily walking particularly beneficial for many reasons, from health to happiness. For example, walking for an average of 30 minutes a day can lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes by 30-40%.

Exercise doesn't need to be strenuous to be beneficial for your health. The Australian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines recommend people over 65 do 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity each day.

You could choose to walk at a steady pace, or have short walks throughout the day, or walk up and down hills and stairs. Every little helps! Having the ability to walk without support is one of the best indicators of independent living.



# More benefits of walking

Walking can improve your health and wellbeing so that you can stay independent for longer. Some other benefits of walking include:

- Improving your strength
- Helping you maintain a healthy bodyweight
- Maintaining bone health
- Lowering your risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes
- Improving your mood and reducing anxiety and depression
- Improving your energy levels and increasing your stamina.



## How do I get started?

One size does not fit all! Find a way to make walking pleasurable and interesting to you. This will help you stick to your new healthy habit for the long-term. You could try:

- Walking around your local neighbourhood, along the coastline, or a walking trail through the countryside
- Taking your dog for a walk
- Going for regular walks with friends, family, or carers
- Walking to see the sunrise or sunset
- Joining a walking club or group walks.

# What do I need for walking?

You don't need a gym or exercise equipment to start walking. It is one of the most cost-effective ways to be physically active. However, there are a few things to check before you get started. These include:

## Health and wellbeing:

If you have any health conditions or injuries, it is important to consult your doctor for advice. This is particularly important if you have not exercised for a while. If your doctor is concerned, ask whether there are any alternative activities you could do. They can help you choose suitable activities to match your health and fitness needs, or they may refer you to an exercise professional.

## Support and safety:

Using a walking stick, hiking poles, walking frame, or wheeled walker shouldn't stop you from going for a walk. These assistive products improve your balance, lighten the load on your joints, and make it easier for you to move around. If you feel you need support and that you would benefit from an assistive walking product, it is important to see an allied health professional. They can help you find the right product for you and set it up properly.

## Clothing and footwear:

Ensure you wear the correct shoes for walking. Comfortable clothing and footwear work well for most people. If you have issues with your feet or need specific footwear advice, talk to your doctor or podiatrist.

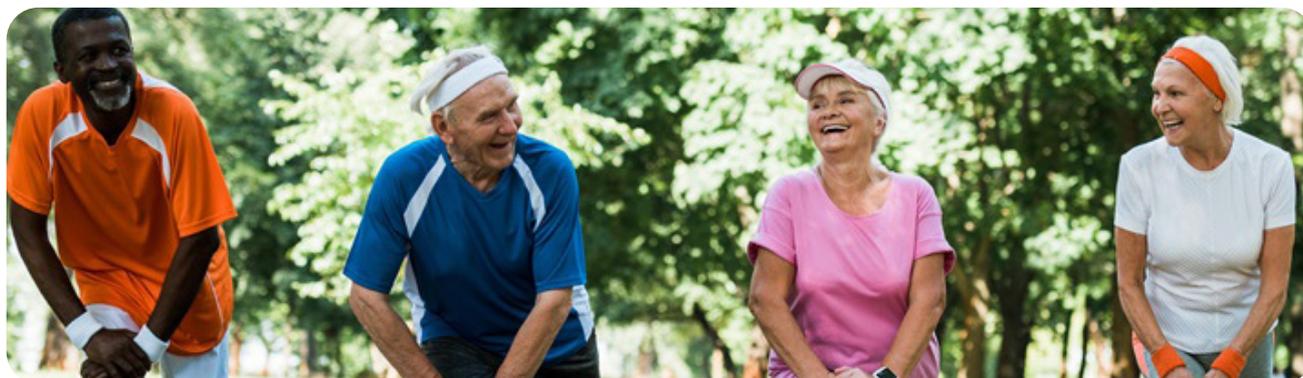


# Stay safe while walking

Make sure to warm-up before your walk. Start walking slowly for the first 10 minutes or so before increasing to a faster speed.

After your walk, take a few minutes to cool down and let your heart rate return to normal. Try a few gentle stretches before and after walking. Focus on moving the joints in your lower body. Add any movements that feel pleasant to your routine!

A good way to judge how fast to walk is to rate how you feel on a scale of 0 – 10, where 0 is resting and 10 is working extremely hard. To feel the benefits without pushing yourself too hard, your walking should be somewhere between a 3 (moderate) and 6 (somewhat hard). Stop if you need to, pushing ahead when it's not safe can cause injury.



## Planning your walk

Take a mobile phone or personal alarm with you and make sure the battery is fully charged so you can contact someone in an emergency.

Let a family member, friend, or neighbour know of your walking plan, how long it will take, and the route you're walking. Check in with them when you're home to let them know you're safe.

Checking the weather will make sure you don't get caught out and are wearing the right clothing for the conditions.

Have a backup plan in place in case walking home becomes too challenging. Consider where you can find a taxi or local public transport. Make sure you can buy a ticket or pay for a taxi home.

Stay well hydrated on your walk by taking a water bottle with you.

# What if I need help to walk?

There are lots of assistive products available for people who need help getting around.

Walking aids improve balance, increase stability, and assist with general weakness or injury.

They provide safety by preventing falls and improve independence by supporting you to move without the help of a carer or loved one.

Some common assistive products are explained in the following sections.

## Walking sticks

A walking stick can support you if you have difficulty walking. Walking sticks are an excellent aid for stability and balance. They're also helpful for people recovering from surgery or injuries.

Types of walking stick include:

- Single point walking sticks are the most common, usually made of wood or aluminium
- 3-point or tripod walking sticks are suitable for those who require extra support when walking
- 4-point or quad sticks are ideal for those who require more support with balance and stability.



# Walking frames

A standard walking frame has four legs and is picked up and moved forward with each step. Although it is more taxing to use, it is a popular choice because it provides extra stability thanks to its wide base of support.

Two-wheeled walking frames are available for people who find it too difficult to move a standard walking frame. This type of frame is ideal for people who are confident with their upper body strength and want less weight on their legs.

If you need more support a rollator or wheeled walker might be more suitable.



## Rollator or wheeled walker

Wheeled walkers provide support for people who experience problems with balance and stability. Different walker types are used for different stages of rehabilitation, depending on your needs.

Outdoor walkers have larger wheels and are larger in size. They are more durable, so they roll over any obstacles in your path.

Indoor walkers are lightweight and smaller compared to outdoor walkers. They are much better suited for use at home. Many models include a tray to assist you in carrying food or drinks.

# Where can I get help?

If you need advice or have any questions, you can find help through:

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Your local council for information about walking groups, walking tracks and parks
- The Heart Foundation website has personal walking plans and information about walking groups in your local area
- A physiotherapist or exercise physiologist. They can develop a tailored walking program for you based on your health and medical history.

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## CONTACT US

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