



**F**ITNESS walking provides you with a great low-impact workout and is about as hassle-free as any physical activity can be. It's a great stress buster and an excellent way to burn stored body fat. While it concentrates on the legs, it firms up the whole body and also helps build up bone density, fighting diseases such as cancer, atherosclerosis and osteoporosis.

NAWAZ MODI  
tells you how  
to make fitness  
walking work  
for you

GO  
TAKE A  
WALK

Fitness walking is continuous walking at a fast enough pace for a sufficiently long period of time to produce beneficial results on the cardiovascular system. Basically put, you have to walk fast enough and long enough to make it work.

How long is that? About 35 to 45 minutes. How fast? Enough to bring the pulse up to 160-180 beats per minute. This is the average person's 'fat burning zone' or 'target heart range'. Ideally, this should be worked out individually for each person, by a fitness professional.

## The right way

The best surfaces for walking are those which are designed for shock absorption. Running tracks, grass and dirt are ideal. Concrete is harder on the joints and muscles, and therefore avoidable. Try to include hills on your walks. This will increase your work load and the calories you burn.

Ideally, walking shoes should have a lower profile than running shoes, but yet have adequate cushioning for the heel. There should be ample room for the ball of the foot and the toes to spread out.

Point your feet and knees straight ahead. Don't let them turn diagonally outward or inward. The proper foot action during fitness walking is a push off from the heel, followed by rolling onto the ball of the foot, and concluding with a strong push through the big toe. Imagine your big toe is a 'go' button, and keep the other toes relaxed.

Keep your knees bent in order to reduce stress to the knee joint. The knees should be 'soft' or 'loose', not locked back. Your body weight, coupled with the impact of exercise, can place a lot of unnecessary pressure on the knee joint if this precaution is not taken, thereby increasing the risk of injury.

## Some pointers

### Warm up and cool-down

Like all other forms of exercise, fitness walking requires a proper warm-up and cool-down, for they play vitally important roles in prevention of injuries. Begin and end with a stroll for about 8-10 minutes, followed by a few gentle stretches. Areas which definitely should be stretched are the tibia and calves (front and back of the lower legs), quadriceps and hamstrings (front and back of the upper legs). Ask a fitness professional which stretches are best for you.

### Stay well hydrated

Drink plenty of water before, after and during your walk — especially on hot days. During your workout, avoid gulping water; sip it instead. By doing this you will avoid muscle cramps and stitches.

### Pace yourself

Don't bite off more than you can chew! While the goal is to walk 35 to 45 minutes per workout, start slowly. A gradual increase in both duration and

intensity will ensure long-term success. This will also greatly reduce the risk of injury. If you're just getting started, try and make it three times a week. Slowly build this up to six days a week.

Take small, quick steps — this will also work your gluteal muscles (those in your buttocks).

## Practise perfect posture

### Use the upper body

Use your arms as you normally do when walking — arms swinging in opposition to the legs — but try to exaggerate the arm swing when fitness walking. Let the arms rise up to shoulder level or even higher. When you first start out, use the straight-arm swing. As you progress to a faster pace or use hand weights, start using a bent-arm swing. As the pace of your walk increases, however, it will no longer be comfortable to swing straight arms fast enough to keep up with the increased frequency of the strides.

### Zip it up!

Imagine you're zipping up a tight pair of jeans. Stand tall and tighten the abdominal muscles. Do this even when you're not walking.

### Chin up!

Look up to see about three to four metres ahead of you. This will keep your neck correctly aligned.

### Keep your shoulders back and chest up

Stand straight. Don't slump over. Imagine someone emptied a bucket of ice down the back of your shirt! That should do the trick!

## Using weights

Weights are optional, not essential. They will help increase the intensity of your walk, and will tone and condition the upper body. While walking with weights is great, it is possible that that you may tend to adjust the pace by slowing down to compensate for the extra weight. In that case, you might be better off without weights.

When using weights, don't use a straight-arm swing. Keep the arms bent and close to your upper torso. Ask a fitness professional about correct fitness walking techniques when you add on weights.

## Have fun!

Enjoy your walks and don't mentally replay your problems during them. Take along a friend or partner or your walkman and favourite music. Wear comfortable clothes. If you're walking outdoors, change your route to avoid monotony.

## Stay with it

Consistency is going to be the most important part of your walking regimen. It is important to stay committed. Don't forget — you're getting slimmer, stronger and leaner with every passing day!