

Building a Pain Free walking program

Walking can form an essential part of recovery from, as well as prevention of, back pain. This pain free walking program is a guide to help you build up your walking capacity and gain the multitude of health benefits available from this extremely accessible and cheap form of physical activity.

If you currently have a high pain sensitivity and at present walking aggravates your pain then you may need to utilise other strategies to reduce this before embarking on a walking program.

However that does not mean you should avoid walking (even if it hurts). Move around and walk little and often. (eg for 1 minute every half an hour)

Once you can start to walk for short periods without it increasing pain then you can begin to increase how much you walk and embark on the walking program.

Good walking technique

- ▶ **Firstly stand up tall in a good posture**
- ▶ **Begin walking and swing the arms from the shoulders not the elbows**
- ▶ **Progress to a faster, purposeful walk that “means business.”
Walk like you have somewhere to be**

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A few key points

- ▶ As you embark on any increase in physical activity you may feel achy afterwards. This does NOT mean the activity is bad for you. It is your muscles and joints adapting to the increased demands placed on them and becoming stronger.
- ▶ When doing your walks wear comfortable footwear and clothing. Other than that you don't need anything! One of the things that makes walking so great is the fact that you don't need any equipment and can do it anywhere.
- ▶ The walking program has been written to include 1 walk on 5 days of the week. However if it suits you better you could split these walks up. For example instead of doing one 20 min walk you do 2 x 10 min walks. The important thing is the total of time spent walking each week and gradually increasing this.
- ▶ To get the best results and increase the chances of adhering to the program plan when you are going to do the walks.
- ▶ It can be beneficial to do a warm up and and a cool down. However, although it is helpful it is not necessary and so don't let it be a barrier that might stop you doing a walk

As you start to lengthen your walks you might benefit from taking "micro-breaks"

These micro breaks essentially involve taking a mini pause in the middle of your walk and allow you to "check in" with your posture and technique.

Stand up nice and tall with your feet shoulder width apart. Take a big breath in and on the out breath rotate your shoulders so that your thumbs turn outwards. Hold this for a second or so. Do these a couple of times or at ten minute intervals during the walk if you would like to.



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Warm up

To prepare your body for the walk it can be helpful to perform a few warm up exercise that lubricate the joints and increase blood flow to the muscles.

Leg swings. Hold onto a chair or wall and gently swing your leg. Repeat 10 times on each side.

Shoulder rolls. Perform a few shoulder rolls - ten times forward and ten times backwards.



Cool down

A couple of useful stretches to perform after the walk include stretching your calves and your hip flexors. Hold these for around 15-20 seconds and repeat twice on each side

Calf stretch. Stand near a wall with one foot in front of the other and your front knee slightly bent. Keeping your back knee straight and your heel on the floor lean towards the wall. You should feel a stretch in your calf.

Hip flexor stretch. Kneel on one knee and place your other foot flat on the floor in front of you. Move/lean forwards so you can feel a stretch in the front part of your thigh (the one where the knee is on the floor)

For comfort it can sometimes help to put a pillow under the knee.



The walking program

Can you walk for short periods without increasing your back pain?

YES

Proceed to Week 1 of the walking program

NO

Walk little and often throughout the day and utilise other pain relieving strategies

Week 1

10 minute walk
10 minute walk
15 minute walk
10 minute walk
15 minute walk

Week 2

15 minute walk
20 minute walk
15 minute walk
20 minute walk
15 minute walk

Week 3

20 minute walk
20 minute walk
20 minute walk
20 minute walk
20 minute walk

Week 4

25 minute walk
25 minute walk
20 minute walk
25 minute walk
25 minute walk

Were you able to complete this comfortably?

NO

Repeat week 1

YES

Proceed to week 2

Were you able to complete this comfortably?

NO

Repeat week 2

YES

Proceed to week 3

Were you able to complete this comfortably?

NO

Repeat week 3

YES

Proceed to week 4

Were you able to complete this comfortably?

NO

Repeat week 4

YES

Proceed to week 5



Week 5

20 minute walk
20 minute walk
20 minute walk
20 minute walk
20 minute walk

This week is a recovery week so is less than the week previous. The purpose of this is to allow the body to adapt and recover more fully from your increased activity levels



Week 6

25 minute walk
25 minute walk
20 minute walk
25 minute walk
25 minute walk

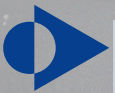
Were you able to compete this comfortably?

NO

Repeat week 6

YES

Proceed to week 7



Week 7

30 minute walk
25 minute walk
30 minute walk
25 minute walk
30 minute walk

Were you able to compete this comfortably?

NO

Repeat week 7

YES

Proceed to week 8



Week 8

One **30 minute** walk on 5 days of the week

Congratulations!

You have now reached the recommended level of 150 minutes per week moderate physical activity that is recommended for large and meaningful health benefits.

Now you have reached this level of activity be sure to continue to maintain the health benefits or use walking as part of a contribution to your 150 minutes of moderate physical exercise per week. Whatever works best for you.

If you did this along with strength exercises on two days of the week the health benefits are numerous. It can help you to have better sleep, manage stress, maintain a healthy weight . It will also decrease your risk of heart disease, strokes, certain cancers, type 2 diabetes, dementia, falls, depression, back pain and all cause mortality (the risk of dying from anything).

