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Ten Tips for Fitness Walking

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Walking is one of the easiest and least expensive ways to stay physically fit. It's also a versatile form of exercise that can be done indoors (many malls and public buildings offer walking routes) or outdoors, and you can tailor the intensity of your exercise based upon your individual abilities and goals. Whether you'd like to begin walking for exercise or if you're already established in the habit, these tips can help you get the most from your workout.

1. ***Before starting a walking program, check with your doctor*** if you have a chronic medical condition or if you have had a recent injury. But don't assume that you aren't able to start exercise walking if you do have medical issues. Exercise walking can help control disease progression and relieve symptoms in people with cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and many people with arthritis or other musculoskeletal problems will experience symptom relief from a medically-supervised exercise walking routine.
2. ***Invest in good shoes.*** Since these are the only expense and equipment you'll need, pay attention to the fit and quality of your shoes. Shoes should fit when you try them on without any areas of pinching or pressure that could cause blisters or calluses. Wear the type of socks you'll wear when walking when you purchase your shoes, and remember that you'll likely need a larger-sized shoe than you normally wear if you plan to wear thick socks. Shoes should have good arch support and a slightly elevated heel with stiff material to support the heel when walking and prevent wobbling.
3. ***Always warm up*** by walking at a slow or normal walking pace for five minutes before picking up the tempo of your workout.
4. ***Pay attention to your heart rate and breathing.*** Walk at a pace that challenges you and elevates your heart rate, but don't overdo. You should be able to talk and carry on a conversation while you are exercising; if you can't, you may be working too hard.
5. ***Use good walking posture.*** The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons recommends maintaining the following posture when exercise walking: Swing your arms. Keep your head up, back straight and abdomen flat. Point your toes straight ahead. Take long strides, but don't strain.
6. ***Consider getting a pedometer*** to track the distance you've walked or the number of steps you've taken. Watching your improvement over time is a terrific source of motivation.

7. ***Be sure to carry water*** if you're walking long distances or are exercising in hot weather. In very hot weather you may need fitness drinks or other sources of electrolytes as well.
8. In the heat of summer, don't forget to ***wear a hat with a brim and to apply sunscreen*** to exposed areas.
9. ***Vary your route if you're getting bored***. To increase your fitness, add a route with some hills or changes in terrain. Or alternate routes on different days of the week.
10. ***Keep your workout interesting***. Many people walk with a buddy or in groups for support and motivation. While lots of walkers swear by their iPods to keep them going, I prefer to pay extra attention to the sights and sounds around me. Find the solution that keeps you moving.