

Walking for fun and fitness - getting started

Walking is a great way to improve or maintain your overall health. Just 30 minutes every day can increase cardiovascular fitness, strengthen bones, reduce excess body fat and boost muscle power and endurance. Unlike some other forms of exercise, walking is free and doesn't require any special equipment or training.

Walking for fun and fitness isn't limited to strolling by yourself around local neighbourhood streets. There are various clubs, venues and strategies you can use to make walking an enjoyable and social part of your lifestyle.

Walking alone

There are various ways to keep your daily walk interesting. Suggestions include:

- If you want to stick close to home and limit your walking to neighbourhood streets, pick different routes so you don't get tired of seeing the same sights.
- If you feel unsafe walking alone, find one or more friends or family members to walk with.
- Walk at various times of the day. The sights to see first thing in the morning are bound to be different to those of the afternoon or early evening.
- Drive to different reserves, park the car and enjoy the views while you walk.
- A dog that needs regular exercise gives you the motivation to walk every day. You might like the companionship too. If you don't have a dog, and aren't planning on getting one, consider offering to walk a neighbour's dog from time to time.

Dog walking

Your dog needs regular exercise and there's no better workout for both of you than walking at a brisk pace. Suggestions on ensuring the safety of your dog and other people on foot include:

- Be considerate of other pedestrians and always keep your dog on its leash.
- If you plan to walk in a park, check first to see if dogs are permitted. Many national and state parks and other conservation reserves do not permit dogs.
- Other parks generally permit dog-walking on a leash. Many parks allow dogs off the leash – check with your local council.
- Make sure you take all the appropriate equipment (such as plastic bags and gloves) so that you can clean up after your dog.

Walking with others

Walking with others can turn a bout of exercise into an enjoyable social occasion. Suggestions include:

- Schedule a regular family walk – this is a great way to pass on healthy habits to your children and spend time together, while getting fit at the same time.
- If walking with children, make sure the route and length of time spent walking is appropriate to their age.
- Babies and young toddlers enjoy long walks in the pram. Take the opportunity to point out items of interest to young ones, such as vehicles, flowers and other pedestrians.
- Look for the self-guided nature walks that have been set up in many parks. Younger children enjoy looking for the next numbered post; older ones can learn about the plants and animals of the park, and perhaps take photos or record their experience in other ways.
- Ask neighbours or friends if they would like to join you on your walks. Think of starting a walking group.

Walking clubs and associations

There are a number of walking clubs throughout Victoria, both in metropolitan and regional areas. Some cater for specific groups (such as women, dog walkers or bushwalkers), while others offer the opportunity to meet new people in your local area. Organisations to contact for further information include:

- **Bushwalking Victoria** – offers a comprehensive listing of bushwalking clubs.
- **Your local council** – may run a range of walking activities for people living in your area.
- **The Lost Dogs Home in Melbourne** – they suggest you 'Get Fit with a Dog'. Contact them for more information about being a responsible dog owner.
- **Parks Victoria** – can provide suggestions and ideas for interesting walks in park and reserves throughout Victoria.

Safety suggestions

Walking is generally a safe way to exercise, but look out for unexpected hazards. Suggestions include:

- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are aged over 40 years, are overweight or haven't exercised in a long time.
- Choose walks that are appropriate for your age and fitness level. Warm up and cool down with a slow, gentle walk to ease in and out of your exercise session.
- Wear sunglasses, sunscreen, a long-sleeved shirt and a hat to avoid sunburn.
- Carry a walking stick or umbrella to fend off unleashed, unfriendly dogs.
- Wear appropriate footwear to reduce the risk of blisters or shin splints.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after your walk.
- If you are bushwalking, check the weather forecast and take appropriate safety measures (for example, pack correct clothing).
- Look out for hazards in alpine or coastal areas, such as cliff edges or large waves.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local council
- Your local community health centre
- Lost Dogs Home Tel. (03) 9329 2755 or
- Parks Victoria Information Centre Tel. 13 1963
- Bushwalking Victoria Tel. (03) 8846 4131
- 'Go for your life' Infoline service Tel. 1300 739 899
- VICSRAPID Victorian Sport and Recreation Association for Intellectual Disability Tel. (03) 9639 3399

Things to remember

- Walking is a great way to improve or maintain your overall health.
- Walking with others can turn exercise into an enjoyable social occasion.
- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are aged over 40 years, are overweight or haven't exercised in a long time.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Parks Victoria

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