

Walking tips

Walking is an excellent form of exercise for people of all ages and abilities. Start your walking program gradually, increasing length and pace as you get used to it. The following suggestions may help you to incorporate regular walking into your lifestyle.

General walking tips

If you have not walked distances for some time, you should start slowly. Increase the length and pace of your walk gradually. Here are some tips on how to get started and how to prepare for walking.

- **Warm-up activity** – start slowly, do a few warm-up exercises and stretches first. Don't walk immediately after a big meal.
- **Build activity slowly** – start with a 20 minute walk then increase gradually. Try to walk at least three times per week.
- **Use the correct technique** – walk at a steady pace, swing your arms freely and stand as straight as you can. Your feet should step in a rolling action from the heel to the toe.
- **Shoes and socks** – wear thick comfortable cotton socks. Sensible, comfortable and lightweight shoes with support are best.
- **Weather** – wear suitable warm, light clothing in the winter and cool, comfortable clothes in the summer. Don't forget your sunscreen and hat.
- **Water** – drink water before and after your walk. Take water with you on your walk, especially in warm weather.
- **Cool down** – make sure you cool down after a long fast walk. Do a few stretching exercises.

Children

Statistics show that Australian children are living increasingly sedentary lives. Suggestions on encouraging your child to enjoy regular walks include:

- If your child finds television and computer games more interesting than exercise, consider getting them a dog. Your child's desire to love and care for the animal may encourage them to take it on regular walks. Remember, though, that dogs aren't permitted in most national parks and other conservation reserves.
- Boost your child's interest in outdoor activities by visiting some of Victoria's scenic areas and organising fun activities, such as sailing on Albert Park Lake or camping for the weekend at Wilsons Promontory National Park.
- Encourage your child's interest in nature through books and websites, then follow-up with 'field trips' so they can discover their favourite animals or plants for themselves (and enjoy the health benefits of walking at the same time).
- 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.
- When walking with children, make sure the route and length of time spent walking is appropriate to their age. Approximately 1km per birthday is a good rule of thumb. For example, a four year old can be expected to walk up to 4km, with plenty of rest breaks.
- Start good habits early. Take young babies and toddlers for walks in their pram. As they get older, encourage them to walk part of the way.
- Look for self-guided nature walks, which 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.

Seniors

Regular weight-bearing exercise can improve cardiovascular fitness and bone strength, reduce excess body fat and boost muscle power. Walking is an excellent form of exercise for the elderly, since it is low impact, free and high in health benefits. Suggestions include:

- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are overweight, haven't exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.
- Contact Parks Victoria on 13 1963 or visit www.parks.vic.gov.au for information on suitable parks and reserves in your area. Issues to consider include access, terrain and the number of park benches
- Consider joining a walking club specific to your needs and age group. Contact VICFIT for further information on their neighbourhood Walk and Talk program, or contact your local council.
- Consider starting up a walking club of your own with friends and neighbours.

People with disabilities

People with disabilities will also benefit from regular exercise. Suggestions include:

- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program.
- Parks Victoria can provide information about which parks and reserves offer special access (such as wheelchair access) and facilities. Check their website, as many parks have been given an accessibility rating, or call 13 1963
- VICSRAPID – Victorian Sport and Recreation Association for Intellectual Disability – runs sporting and recreational programs for people with disabilities (particularly intellectual disabilities) of all ages.
- An able-bodied person can help someone with a disability to better enjoy their neighbourhood walk or bush walk. For example, a sighted companion can warn a vision-impaired person of upcoming obstacles.
- National parks allow guide dogs, although domestic dogs, cats and other pets are strictly forbidden.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local council
- Parks Victoria Information Centre Tel. 13 1963
- VICSRAPID Victorian Sport and Recreation Association for Intellectual Disability website or Tel. (03)9926 1380
- Bushwalking Victoria, Tel. (03) 8846 4131

Things to remember

- Walking is an excellent form of exercise for people of all ages and abilities.
- Prepare for a walk by warming up, wearing the correct clothing and shoes, and making sure that you are well hydrated. Warm down after a walk.
- See your doctor for a medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program, particularly if you are obese, haven't exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.

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

Parks Victoria

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.