

How Often Should I Walk to Get Exercise?

By Allen Smith, eHow User



According to the American [College](#) of Sports Medicine, American Adults are a sedentary lot. A 2005 study indicated that less than half of all Americans met the ACSM guidelines for getting 30 minutes or more of aerobic [exercise](#), five to seven days a week. The guidelines were designed to maintain and promote [health](#) and are separate from those designed for losing weight. So, how often should YOU walk to exercise?

Before You Get Started

If it's been a while since you've exercised or you're about to embark on a new program, it's a good idea to begin at your doctor's office. Tell him that you're going to start exercising and that you need to know if you have any health concerns that could affect your plans. Chances are, he'll begin with a complete physical examination, a health history questionnaire, and a blood lipid profile. He'll be looking for risk factors for heart disease such as cigarette smoking, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, or high cholesterol levels in your blood. Any one of these could affect your approach to walking for exercise. If you're over the age of 40 or have a family history of heart disease, he may recommend that you have either a resting electrocardiogram, an exercise stress test, or both. The results of the tests will be used in your exercise prescription.

Your Exercise Prescription

Like a prescription for medications, your exercise prescription should be written by a qualified professional, like an ACSM certified exercise specialist. Exercise specialists take your entire health history into account before designing your walking program. Assuming you've been given the green light, they'll probably recommend that you begin walking 10 to 15 minutes, five days a week at a conversational pace. A conversational pace is one that challenges your breathing but allows you to carry on a conversation with an exercise buddy. Depending on your goals (whether you're walking for fitness or to lose weight) you'll need to slowly increase your walking periods approximately 10% per week until you reach 30 minutes. After you reach 30 minutes, you should start increasing the intensity and duration of your walking. If you're trying to lose weight, try to expend several hundred calories a day. Since many people only expend around 100 calories an hour walking at 3.0 mph, you'll need to slowly increase your walking speed or add some moderate hills to your walking route. If you're really serious about losing weight, you can walk two or more times a day. It's important, however, to include at least one day of rest per week.

Using Goals to Enhance Your Walking

Goals are a great way to enhance your walking program and to see improvements in your health. After you've established a base of at least 30 to 45 minutes of walking per session, start looking around for a professionally organized fun walk. Some of the best are the Susan B. Komen Walk/Run for the Cure events to benefit breast cancer. There are events scheduled all over the country, over the entire year, for all levels of fitness. If large events aren't for you, create a series of personal goals you can achieve all by yourself. For instance, if you've never made it walking all the way to the mall, make it a point to use that as your motivation. You can use your car's odometer to accurately measure courses to use in your goal setting. Mix it up a little by walking down by the beach or up in the mountains. Keep variety in your program to maintain freshness in your walking program.

Resources

- [Journal of the American Heart Association](#)