

Make Walking Part of Your Routine

Walking more can be easier when you turn it into a habit.

Guess what? If you got out of bed this morning, you jump-started your fitness routine just by walking down the hall to the bathroom. Add a little pep to your stride for an activity that feels less like exercise—but still has the added benefits that exercise provides.



Make walking part of your everyday routine.

Mark Fenton, a health and fitness consultant and author who has written extensively about the benefits of walking, was a member of the U.S. national race-walking team from 1986 to 1991. Now he works as a consultant to help communities implement safe routes for walking and bicycling.

“Make walking a part of your normal routine and you’ll have a much easier time keeping it up,” Fenton says. “Set aside time at a specific time of day to walk, or go about your daily tasks on foot. Walk your dog; pick up your mail on foot. If you can routinize it, you’re more likely to keep doing it.”

Find a walking buddy—or better yet, find someone who’s depending on you.

Find a friend who’s willing to go walking in your neighborhood, or suggest a walking lunch break at work. If there are two of you walking, collectively you’ll benefit from having double the resolve to get out there. A little friendly competition never hurt either—pedometers are an inexpensive way to challenge a colleague or friend to a walk-off, with each of you tallying steps walked and comparing at the end of the week.

Creating accountability is another great way to inspire you to get out the door. Fenton is an advocate for Safe Routes to School, a program that helps kids and their parents find safe walking and bicycling routes to and from schools. Parents take turns accompanying kids to school on designated days—so if you’ve committed to leading the pack two days a week, chances are you’ll feel motivated to get out there and walk to school.

Give it just 10 minutes.

Even former walking pros sometimes need a little push to lace up their shoes. When Fenton’s motivation is flagging, he gets out the door by telling himself he’ll walk for “just 10 minutes.”

“It sounds silly since it’s such a short amount of time, but once you get out there you start feeling the physiological effects of walking,” he says. “Your blood pressure will go down and you’ll feel a flood of positive endorphins, so you might feel motivated to go even longer than 10 minutes. Or maybe you won’t—either way, even exercise in modest doses is better than being sedentary.”

Still can’t convince yourself? Get up and move during commercial breaks—most 30-minute programs include about 8 minutes of commercials, so you’ll be 80 percent closer to reaching your minimum by the time the credits are rolling.