

Walk your way to weight loss...

Walking is great exercise - it's natural, free and good for you! Don't be lulled into thinking it's not 'proper' exercise. It is and **Caroline Sandry** tells you why.





Why walk?

Walking is a low impact exercise option and is less demanding on your joints than running, but all the major muscles of your legs will get a great workout. Walking will develop aerobic fitness. This type of steady paced exercise uses oxygen to ignite the chemical reactions in your muscles that keep you going. And you can burn hundreds of calories whilst taking in the sights. Also most people will be able to walk relatively fast for at least an hour. Walking is also a great stress reliever.

Take a look at the calorie burning figures in table 1 on the opposite page to see what a great exercise option walking is. As you progress your walking, you should increase your speed and include more hills into your walks to increase your calorie burn.

Good technique

I see many people who walk fast but with a very poor technique that will inevitably lead to discomfort or injury. It is important that you can maintain good posture under effort, so practice your technique and stay aware of your posture and form.

Posture

- The neck and shoulders often carry a lot of tension, so roll the shoulders back several times before your walk and try to keep them relaxed and down away from your ears when you are walking
- The neck should be long with the head balanced on the top (sounds obvious but a lot of people look down, or have their head in a forward position). Keep looking forward to maintain good neck alignment and keep your chin parallel to the floor
- Try to stay tall and elegant – think of tribal women carrying buckets of water on their heads – their posture is tall and balanced.

The action

- **Arms** - the arms should be bent but relaxed, and are used to balance the movement of the legs. Think of pulling your arm back as you pull back with the opposite leg, and keep the forward motion of the arm short – the hand only needs to come to around chest height
- **Legs** – stride length is important, but don't try to take huge ones as you will start to swing your whole body and work ineffectively. Keeping your stride short will prevent your body rotating through your hips and diverting valuable energy away from where you need it – to propel you forward. Focus more on the 'pushing-through' phase of the stride rather than the step forward as this is where your power comes from

Walking Posture



eyes forward to
keep neck long
and head up

chest open and
shoulders open
and relaxed

hands cupped lightly

arms bent to
a relaxed 90
degrees

abdominals held in
tight to keep torso
strong and stable

Table 1: Walking speed, gradient and calorie burn per hour

Walking speed	Flat	4% gradient	8% gradient
4.2 km/hr	270cal.	391 cal.	526 cal.
6.4 km/hr	400 cal.	579 cal.	759 cal.
8.0 km/hr	530 cal.	769 cal.	979 cal.

Figures based on 80kg individual. If you weigh more – you'll burn more calories, weigh less and you'll burn less.

- **Hips & Bum** – Try to keep your hips facing forward (imagine your hip bones shine lights like a car's headlamps and keep the beam forwards). The glutes (muscles of your bottom) are very important for fast walking and you should start to see definition as you build up your walking – this will especially be the case if you include some hills on your walks.
- **Abs and back** – Your torso is the base of all your leg work. Try to keep your abs drawn tightly as you walk (navel to spine as if you have very tight jeans on). Your body should remain upright (or very slightly forward) and the torso still.
- **The Feet** - Your heel should strike the ground first, and then your weight should roll across your foot as you push through with your glutes and hamstrings. Your toes should not lift off the floor until the very last moment of the stride. Try to keep your feet pointing forward and relaxed. It is worth having a specialist at a running shop or a physiotherapist (or other suitably qualified person) check whether your gait is balanced. (see 'what to wear below')

What to wear

The only two recommendations I have are good shoes and a decent sports bra. Although the impact is less than with running there is still an element of bounce! Check out Shock absorbers range of great sports bras. My favourite for walking is the level 3 flexiform as it has good support and the straps can be changed to a racer back style.

Shoes

Although walking is the martini of exercise (any time, any place, anywhere!) I would recommend that you wear the 'right' shoes for walking more than 15 minutes. If you are off walking in the Yorkshire Dales, or tramping through the woods, then low ankle height walking boots can be a great idea as they offer ankle support and protection from rocks and debris. However, if you are an urban strider and are pounding the pavements, then a proper well cushioned trainer is needed. Many shoe companies also make specialist walking shoes (see our shoe test on page 82).

Alternative Footwear

There are a whole new generation of specialist shoes available, which have a curved bottom and are somewhat unstable. These are designed to create a more natural walking surface like sand or grass, rather than our modern concrete roads and pavements.

MBTs – (Masai Barefoot Technology) have been around a long while now – they were developed in 1990 by Swiss Engineer Karl Muller to cure back pain and joint problems, MBTs are certified Class 1 Medical Equipment in the EU. I have been working with and recommending them for at least six years. For those of you who

can't run due to back or knee pain, MBTs can provide a fantastic, well-cushioned workout which will shape your thighs and bottom and can help with postural problems.

According to the makers of MBT's their shoes, "re-establishes our natural way of walking and improves our strength, balance, co-ordination and stability by making muscles work harder when you walking and standing". The secret lies in the unique, patented, Masai Sensor Technology in the sole of every pair of MBTs. The sensor is specially designed to recreate the sensation of walking on an unstable surface, which means stepping into a pair of MBTs is like a mini workout for your body. It's claimed that MBT's can, improve, for example posture and gait and muscle activity by 18% in your lower leg and 19% in the back of your thighs, as well as strengthening your core muscles.

Another similar shoe comes from Chung Shi - a German footwear company that operates a Far Eastern Philosophy of balance of body and well being. Their shoes again work by simulating natural, uneven,



MBT Tataga walking shoe



Chung Shi walking shoe

walking surfaces. They claim that with Chung Shi comfort shoes upper leg muscles work 57% harder than with a standard training shoe, and lower leg muscles over 200% harder. They also claim to improve joint problems, stating that Chung Shi are suitable for people recovering from sports injuries or older users who are unable to walk long distances. This is because impact on the ankle joint is reduced by 27% compared to a standard training shoe, and on the knee joint by 24%.

Chung Shi have a reflexology bar in the centre of the shoe (which you can definitely feel), this they claim stimulates the gut area (a great added bonus!) and

massages the sole of the foot.

Personally I have used both the MBTs and Chung Shis, I prefer the MBT for all day use as they feel very cushioned and bouncy. I like the Chung Shi for shorter, more focused use as they feel a little more extreme. With both shoes, I often develop muscle soreness in my bottom a day later – soreness that I would not get if I wore regular trainers, so my muscles are working harder. If you have back or knee problems, check with your practitioner (osteopath or physiotherapist) before investing in either MBT's or Chung Shi shoes as they are not suitable for everyone. **UF**

Post walk stretches

If you are taking walking seriously or have done one of my workouts then as with all forms of exercise you should warm up, cool down and stretch.

I've provided some stretches that you can do at the end of your walk. You should hold each stretch for 15 – 30 seconds.



Sample walk-fit plans

1) Walk Fit Gym Workout – Treadmill

Warm up: 5 minutes – incline level 1: speed 3.6mph

Hill walk: 2 minutes – incline level 5: speed 4mph

Power walk: 2 minutes – incline level 2: speed 4.5-5mph (according to fitness and stride length)

Recovery: walk 1 minute – incline level 1: speed 3.5 mph

Hill walk: 1.5 minutes - max incline: speed 3.8 mph

Power walk: 5 minutes - incline level 2: speed 4.5 – 5 mph

Recover walk: 1 minute – no incline: speed 3.5 mph

Hill walk: 2 minutes – incline level 8: speed 4 mph

Cool down: 3 - 5 minutes – no incline: speed 3.4 mph

2) Walk fit circuit – gym or outdoors

Warm up: walk 5 minutes

Power walk: as fast as possible maintaining form for 10 minutes

Triceps dips: using bench or step: 3 sets, 12 reps

Walking lunge: 2 sets, 10 reps each leg

Power walk: 10 minutes

Press-ups: 2 to 3 sets, 10 to 12 reps

Squats: 2 sets, 15 reps

Power walk: 8 minutes

Cool down walk: 2 - 4 minutes

Oblique curls: 15 each side

Ab crunches: 2 sets, 15 reps

To track down the products mentioned in Caroline's article go to:

www.asics.co.uk

www.shockabsorber.co.uk

www.swissmasai.co.uk

www.lizziefitness.co.uk