

Walking; A Perfect Exercise

Most people know that physical therapists often recommend exercise as part of their treatment. What most people don't realize is how simple that exercise can be. Instead of complicated workouts, heavy weightlifting, or running for miles, physical therapists often surprise people when they recommend walking.

While it seems like an easy exercise, walking still has powerful health benefits. Walking 30 minutes a day, 3 times a week has been shown to improve cardiovascular endurance and reduce blood pressure and weight. Lots of people are using activity trackers and apps to track steps during their daily activities, and this too has been shown to have benefits. These include reducing disability and pain associated with conditions like knee osteoarthritis. While many people aim for 10,000 steps per day, research shows that as little as 6,000 steps a day can reduce pain and disability while boosting cardiovascular health.

If you're thinking about starting a regular walking program or just increasing the amount of walking you do throughout the day, it's important that you do it the right way. The general recommendation for building any physical activity is to take whatever amount of the activity you do in a week and increase it by 5% or less per week. A good general starting place would be 3,000 steps per day, and an example program following the 5% rule might look like this:

Week 1: 3000 steps (1.5 miles)	Week 8: 4500 steps (2.25 miles)
Week 2: 3150 steps	Week 9: 4800 steps
Week 3: 3300 steps	Week 10: 5000 steps (2.5 miles)
Week 4: 3500 steps (1.75 miles)	Week 11: 5250 steps
Week 5: 3750 steps	Week 12: 5500 steps (2.75 miles)
Week 6: 4000 steps (2 miles)	Week 13: 5800 steps
Week 7: 4200 steps	Week 14: 6000 steps (3 miles)

If you're not sure if you're ready to walk the recommended 6,000 steps a day, you can always visit a physical therapist for a review of your medical history and baseline testing to find out what a safe level for you to start at would be. A PT can also help you design a program to safely meet your goals.

One last thing to consider is footwear. Although walking is less stressful than running, it's still important to take care of your feet. Shoes designed for running work well to cushion and support your feet when walking too. If you need help picking the right pair, a PT can help and so can the staff at a good specialty running store.