How to Walk with Proper Form and Technique
The Art and Science of Fitness Walking
By Dean Anderson, Fitness Expert

Walking comes naturally to humans. It's one of the earliest skills we develop, long before we learn how to talk (or invent excuses to avoid walking). And given good, basic health, it's something you can do throughout your life without worrying about overdoing it. Prior to the last century, walking was the primary mode of day-to-day transportation for most people, and often involved much more time and distance than most of us spend at it today.

So if you're wondering whether walking is challenging enough to keep you fit, don't. Fitness walking (as opposed to leisurely walking to do everyday tasks) can build endurance, strengthen your bones, improve your health profile and help you manage your weight. And many people who have successfully lost weight and kept it off over time have made fitness walking the foundation of their fitness routines. But like anything else, the more walking you want to do, the more important it becomes to do it right. By the time many of us get to adulthood, especially if via the sedentary route, we have developed some postural quirks and bad habits that can make even simple walking a source of aches and pains.

So, here are some walking basics that will help keep your walking workouts safe and effective by building your walking technique from the ground up.

Think "Heel to Toe"

Comfortable and efficient walking begins with a good foot strike, which allows your ankle to move through its complete range of motion. Here's how to do it properly:

1. Step forward landing squarely on the heel of your foot.
2. Roll forward onto the ball of the foot.
3. Raise the heel and push off with your big toe.

As the heel of your front foot is striking, you are being propelled forward by your back foot, pushing off the ground. Unlike a running stride, your feet should never lift off the ground completely when walking.

To get an idea of how this heel-to-toe motion should feel, try sitting on a chair with your legs extended straight out in front of you, toes pointing straight up to the ceiling. With your left foot, bring your toes back toward you so your heel is extended and your foot is flexed; with your right foot, push your toes forward as if pushing on the air with the ball of your foot and big toe. Then slowly reverse the positions of your feet, moving back and forth several times for one minute. This is the ideal motion for walking. But because most of us don't walk perfectly, you may feel some burning or tension in your shins or calves. This means that those muscles (where you feel the soreness) are underused, and you may need to do some strengthening and stretching exercises so that you can walk as close to perfect heel-to-toe form as possible.

Find Your Stride

Everyone has a natural stride length that is most comfortable, and it may be shorter or longer than someone else's stride. One of the most common mistakes you can make with fitness walking is to increase the length of your strides in order to walk faster. That's OK for running, as over striding can strain your muscles and joints causing pain in the arches of your feet, and your knees, hips and heels. If you want to walk faster, focus on taking more steps per minute, not taking longer steps.

How fast should you walk? It depends on your fitness level, stride length, and turnover rate. Here are some general guidelines:

- Slow to moderate walking is a 3 to 3.5 mph pace (17-20 minutes per mile), about 115-120 steps per minute.
- Brisk walking is about a 4 mph pace (15 minutes per mile), about 135 steps per minute.
- Fast walking (or jogging) starts at a 5 mph pace (12 minutes per mile), which is about 160 steps per minute. Most people cannot walk at this pace. It's usually easier and more efficient to jog than it is to walk once you work up to this speed.

Walk the (Straight) Line

Be aware of your posture. Stand as tall as possible, feet pointing forward, abs engaged, back straight, neck in line with your shoulders (not forward), head up, and eyes gazing about 10 feet ahead of you. When walking, your center of gravity should move forward, not side-to-side (known as hip sway). Your pelvis will rotate forward with each step, but should not turn from side to side. Try to keep your legs in line with your hips and toes pointing forward, not inward (pigeon-toed) or outward (duck-toed).

Pump It Up—Your Arms, That is

You've probably seen those "serious" fitness walkers who pump their arms vigorously as if they were running. Even if it makes you feel self-conscious, this is the most efficient way to walk—especially at higher speeds. When your arms are too straight, it can be difficult (even painful) to pump them enough to achieve a good speed. And if your hands swell during exercise, keeping your elbows bent can help avoid or minimize that.

Keep your arms close to your sides and bend your elbows at 90 degrees. Keep them bent at a right angle while you walk. When pumping your arms, the movement should come from your shoulders, not your elbows, and your hands shouldn't raise higher than chest level. Finally, avoid clenching your hands. Imagine you're carrying something delicate in them, like a raw egg—don't squeeze tight enough to break it, nor so loose that you drop it. Try not to exaggerate the movement of your arms, but do use them to your advantage. You can only walk as fast as your arms pump.

Take to the Hills

There's a natural tendency to lean forward when walking uphill and lean backward when walking downhill. However, leaning can put a lot of strain on your back, and should be avoided when possible. So what's a walker to do? Remember your cues for posture and form. Maintain your posture as upright as possible, especially on mild and moderate hills. Steep declines may require slight leaning, but be careful not to put too much weight in your heels, which can cause your feet to slip out from under you on loose terrain. When walking up an incline, push upward and forward with your toes, pumping your arms to help you.
How to Walk with Proper Form and Technique

continued from page 1

The 8 Keys to Proper Fitness Walking

1. Stand tall, with your shoulders back, head and neck aligned with your spine, and abs pulled in.
2. Push off with the entire foot, and land squarely on the heel of your lead foot.
3. Roll through the entire foot, from heel strike to the ball of your foot to the final push off with your toes, allowing your ankle to move through its full range of motion.
4. Avoid over-striding. Increase the number of steps per minute to increase speed.
5. Bend elbows at a right angle, and swing your arms from the shoulder, keeping elbows close to your sides.
6. Avoid clenching hands or over-swinging your arms.
7. Minimize leaning on hills.
8. Don’t neglect stretching and strength training, especially if you are experiencing tightness in your shin or calf muscles.

Additional Walking Resources:
- http://www.startwalkingnow.org
- http://everybodywalk.org
- http://www.mapmywalk.com

No More Excuses!
Busting 5 Common Workout Excuses

By Leanne Beattie, Health Fitness Writer

We begin a new fitness routine with the best intentions—telling ourselves that we'll hit the gym three times a week—but actually accomplishing what we set out to do can be harder than expected. Combining a busy work week with other obligations and a list of errands can be a recipe for fitness failure. Exercise has to be pushed to the bottom of the list since there are only so many hours in the day right?

Wrong.

Everyone has the same 24 hours to work with every day. It’s how you decide to spend and prioritize your time that’s the real issue.

Exercise Excuse #1: I’m too tired.
It takes energy to produce energy, so while you may be tired now, even a short 10-minute walk will get your blood pumping and will boost your energy levels for up to two hours after. And regular exercise helps improve the quality of your sleep, meaning more energy throughout the day. Some research suggests working out can help regulate your sleep cycles, so you’ll fall asleep easier, sleep more soundly and wake up more rested. A morning workout—not a cup of coffee—could be just the ticket you need to feel more awake and energized all day long!

Exercise Excuse #2: I don’t have time.
Eliminate 30 minutes of television viewing each night and exercise for half an hour instead. Unlike cough time, this method will strengthen muscles, burn fat, lower your cholesterol and reduce your risk of diabetes and heart disease. Record your favorite shows and watch them while lifting weights or running on the treadmill instead. Get up an hour earlier in the morning and go for a walk before you start your day or bring along your sneakers and go for a walk during your lunch break. There are many little time stealers in your day. Some research suggests working out can help regulate your sleep cycles, so you’ll fall asleep easier, sleep more soundly and wake up more rested. A morning workout—not a cup of coffee—could be just the ticket you need to feel more awake and energized all day long!

Exercise Excuse #3: I can’t afford a gym membership or equipment.
While going to the gym is a great way to get in shape, you don’t need to spend a lot of money to get a good workout. Either sign up for the bare bones membership package (are you really going to use all the perks the gym offers anyway?) or exercise at home for free with help from Spark People’s exercise demos, workouts, videos, and other fitness resources. Push-ups, lunges, crunches and aerobics can all be done in the privacy of your own home and cost no money at all. Don’t forget to borrow some fitness DVDs from your local library ensure you don’t get bored with your routine. Exercising at home also eliminates another avoidance excuse—the weather. Your home treadmill is available rain or shine, 365 days a year.

Exercise Excuse #4: I’m embarrassed by my appearance.
It’s tough to go to the gym if you don’t feel good about your appearance. A well-fitting pair of yoga pants and a new T-shirt go a long way towards making you feel better about your body. Baggy, oversized shirts and track pants may be comfortable, but they make you look bigger, so find some fitness clothes shaped to fit your favorite clothes any longer. “But I’m tired,” you tell yourself. “I’ve had a long day and I deserve to sit back and relax. I’ll just take it easy tonight and I promise to work out tomorrow.” Then tomorrow comes and you’ve got to work late and you’re out of milk so you have to go buy groceries and before you know it, another day has passed and still no exercise. Why is it that you can hold down a job, make it to class, run a household and put everyone else’s needs ahead of your own, while you disapprove yourself every time you miss your own appointment with the treadmill?

Of course there are legitimate reasons to not exercise. But unless you’ve just given birth or had surgery, most of these reasons aren’t reasons at all— they’re excuses. If you’ve been allowing these excuses to keep you from the gym, it’s time to refocus.

Exercise Excuse #5: I should do it tomorrow.
“Tomorrow” comes and you’ve got to work late and you’re out of milk so you have to go buy groceries and before you know it, another day has passed and still no exercise. Why is it that you can hold down a job, make it to class, run a household and put everyone else’s needs ahead of your own, while you disapprove yourself every time you miss your own appointment with the treadmill?

While going to the gym is a great way to get in shape, you don’t need to spend a lot of money to get a good workout. Either sign up for the bare bones membership package (are you really going to use all the perks the gym offers anyway?) or exercise at home for free with help from Spark People’s exercise demos, workouts, videos, and other fitness resources.

“Everyone has the same 24 hours to work with every day. It’s how you decide to spend and prioritize your time that’s the real issue.”

www.sparkpeople.com
De-Stress in 3 Minutes or Less
Stop Emotional Eating Before It Starts
By Dean Anderson, Behavioral Psychology Expert

What is the single, most common problem that most dieters face when trying to lose weight? Will power? Nah. Temptation? Sometimes. Emotional eating? Bingo! That’s why it takes so much more than good intentions and information about nutrition and exercise to be successful. The ability to manage difficult situations and feelings effectively—without turning to food and eating—is a necessary foundation for a successful weight loss plan and healthy lifestyle.

Fortunately, there are many proactive steps you can take to keep functioning on all your mental cylinders during tough times. These steps range widely from basic relaxation techniques to the development of a reliable support network. Other options include:

- Keeping a food journal to help you identify your emotional eating triggers
- Cultivating mental and emotional well-being through practices like meditation, mindfulness, massage, and yoga
- Developing good problem solving skills
- Turning to the Spark People message boards for help and support when you need it; offering help to others as a way to get your mind off your own troubles and gain a little perspective on things.

But all of these things take time, and there are many instances when you need something you can do right now, to keep yourself grounded, focused and able to make good decisions. After all, you don’t always have time to take a walk, relax in a hot bath or call a friend to talk things over. That’s what we’ll be talking about here—a 3 minute trick for handling stressful situations in the moment.

Minute 1: Stay Grounded

Emotional eating happens when you lose your connection to your grounded self. Stress itself is not what makes you reach for something to eat. In fact, stress is often a good thing and your grounded self knows this. We need the physical stress of exercise to keep our bodies in good shape just as we need the stress of intellectual and emotional challenges to keep our minds healthy. Nine times out of ten, what really leads to emotional eating is getting caught in a mind storm of worst-case scenarios, projections, misinterpretations, and all the emotional overreactions that come with these thoughts. This storm turns a manageable challenge into something that makes you feel helpless, overwhelmed, ashamed or afraid—and sends you to the kitchen to find something to stuff those extreme feelings. When you can stay grounded in the moment of stress, you have many more options.

Here are some simple ideas to keep you grounded when something (or someone) pushes your buttons and your feelings start to spiral out of control:

- Take a few deep breaths. (You can also count to 10, if that helps.) If the stressful situation involves someone else, take a timeout and agree to continue the discussion in a few minutes.
- Remind yourself where you are. Take a look around, noticing and naming the colors and shapes in the space around you.
- Notice the physical sensations you are experiencing. Whether it’s a sinking feeling, turmoil in your stomach, tension in your hands or jaw, restricted breathing, or heat on the back of your neck, try to name the feelings that go with the sensation. Is that sinking feeling fear, or dread? Is the heat a symptom of anger? The idea here is to stay in your body and in the moment—with what’s real—instead of going inside your mind where all those unreal scenarios are just waiting to get spun out-of-control.

Minute 2: Reality Check

Once you’re calm enough to start thinking productively, put all those thoughts that are clambering for attention inside your head through a quick reality check. Here are several very common thought patterns that have no place in reality. Do any of these apply to you?

- All or nothing thinking
  Example: You go over your calorie limit or eat something on your “forbidden” list, and then decide to keep eating because you’ve already “blown it” for today. Reality: Weight loss is not a one-day event. If you stop overeating now, you’ll gain less and have less to re-lose later. That’s something to feel good about!
- Reading your own thoughts into someone else’s words
  Example: Someone made a mildly critical or unsupportive remark to you, and you feel completely devastated. Reality: The more bothered you are by such remarks, the more likely it is that you are being overly critical of yourself. When you treat yourself with respect, what others say won’t matter nearly so much.
- Either-Or Thinking
  Example: You make a mistake or have a bad day and feel like a complete and hopeless failure. Reality: People need to learn from their own problems. You aren’t doing anyone a favor by trying to fix things just to make yourself feel better.

Minute 3: Putting Things in Perspective

Most common problems that you face in everyday life are much easier to handle when you keep them in perspective and avoid making mountains out of molehills. Here are some questions you can ask yourself to make sure you aren’t in the mountain-making business:

- How big a deal is this anyway? If I knew I was going to die in a week, would this be something I would want to spend this minute of my remaining time on?
- Do I have all the information I need to decide how to respond to this? Do I really know what’s going on here, or am I making assumptions? Am I worrying about things that might not even happen? What do I need to check out before taking action?
- Is there anything I can do right now that will change or help this situation?
- Am I trying to control something I can’t, like what other people think, say or do?
- Have I really thought through this problem, and broken it down into manageable pieces I can handle one at a time?

Use this approach whenever your thoughts or situations begin to feel overwhelming, and you’ll quickly find that the mountains that seem impossible at first can quickly morph into what they really are—manageable hills that you DO have the ability to climb. All it takes is three little minutes of your time.

Diet Soda: Did You Know...

When researchers from the School of Medicine at The University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio compared the waistlines of diet soda drinkers against a group of non-diet drinkers, the diet soda drinkers had 70 percent greater increases in belly bulge over the course of the 9.5-year study. Low-calorie sweeteners may actually be tricking your body into weight gain. “Some studies suggest that when our taste buds sense sweetness, the body expects a calorie load to accompany it. When that doesn’t happen, it may cause us to overeat because we crave the energy rush our body was expecting,” says Cheryl Forberg R.D., author of Flavor First. Artificial sweeteners might also dull your taste buds, meaning you eat more high-flavor, high-calorie foods to satisfy your cravings, explains Forberg.
Breaking Ground With Breakfast
By Debra Wein, MS, RD, LDN, NSCA_CPT
Source: www.nsca-lift.org/perform

Do you ever feel that breakfast is the last thing on your mind when you first wake up? With research showing the benefits of increased mental alertness, lower weight, improved lifestyles and enhanced health for breakfast eaters, you may never wake up on the same side of the bed again.

What is breakfast anyway?
Break it down—breakfast is “break” and “fast.” That means that just when you wake up, it is the perfect time to break the fast you experienced when you were sleeping. While your body is sleeping, your internal organs are still working, performing involuntary reactions and using fuel for energy. After a good night’s sleep, the levels of glycogen stored in your liver are almost depleted by half. That means that if you start exercising or simply start your day without refueling, you will begin in a depleted or disadvantaged state.

Benefits of Breakfast
1. Breakfast can improve your overall health.
Research shows that individuals who consume breakfast cereal every day report better mental and physical health than those who consume breakfast less frequently. In addition, individuals who consume breakfast regularly have a healthier lifestyle than non-breakfast eaters. Breakfasters are less likely to be smokers, drink less alcohol, and have a healthier diet.

2. Breakfast can keep you alert.
Breakfast, particularly one that is high in fiber and low in fat, is associated with higher post-breakfast alertness, which can last all the way to lunch. Studies show that a high fiber/low fat breakfast is more effective than a low fiber/carbohydrate breakfast, a high fiber/high fat breakfast, or a low fiber/high fat breakfast.

3. Breakfast can help you emotionally.
Research shows that individuals who consume a cereal breakfast each day are less depressed, less emotionally distressed, and have lower levels of perceived stress than those who do not eat breakfast each day.

4. Breakfast can enhance your mental performance.
Breakfast enhances one’s ability to handle tasks requiring aspects of memory, such as word list recall and memory while counting backwards. Now, can you remember all that?

5. The right breakfast can help you manage your weight.
While many of us might skip breakfast, hoping to decrease our daily caloric intake, research shows that individuals who consume a high fiber cereal consume fewer calories at lunch.

Furthermore, in one study, subjects classified as dissatisfied with their weight and who dieted, reported skipping breakfast more frequently than non-dieters.

6. Breakfast can enhance the overall quality of your diet.
Breakfast can set you on the right path for the day. Research shows that individuals who ate ready-to-eat cereal at breakfast between 4 and 7 times during the week consumed significantly less fat and cholesterol and significantly more fiber, carbohydrate, protein, thiamin, niacin, riboflavin, vitamins B6, B12, and A, iron, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, copper, and zinc than those who had no cereal at breakfast.

Putting it all together:
Try any of these high fiber, high carbohydrate, low fat breakfasts.

- 1 hard-boiled egg, 1 slice whole-wheat toast, 1 Tbsp jam/jelly, 1/2 grapefruit, 1/2 cup non fat yogurt (297 calories, 7g of fat, 16g of protein, 4g of fiber)
- 1/2 whole-wheat bagel, 2 tsp light cream cheese, 1 cup non fat yogurt, 1 cup blueberries (453 calories, 5g fat, 16g protein, 6g of fiber)
- 1 cup high fiber cereal (i.e. Shredded Wheat, Grape Nuts or Kashi), 1/2 banana, 8oz low fat milk, 1 orange (360 calories, 4g of fat, 14g of protein, 7g of fiber)
- 1 serving oatmeal, 8oz low fat milk, 1 orange (268 calories, 6g of fat, 12g protein, 5g of fiber)

Compare With These Quick Breakfast:

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<th>% Calories from Fat</th>
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With all of the research supporting the claim that “breakfast is the most important meal of the day,” setting your alarm clock 10 minutes early hardly seems like an inconvenience anymore. Include breakfast as a core part of your daily routine.

No More Excuses!
continued from p. 2

in mind and everyone had to start somewhere. You may feel self-conscious, but chances are that no one is really paying attention to you and if they are, they’re probably silently cheering you on for working towards your goal!

Exercise Excuse #5: I’m too depressed.
A Harvard University study found that after 12 weeks of weight training, nearly 90% of seriously depressed seniors no longer met the criteria for clinical depression. And just 20 minutes of aerobic exercise boosts the levels of your brain’s feel-good chemicals, making you happier and more invigorated. So exercising will actually improve your mood, even if you feel like biting someone’s head off before you begin. Many bad moods are the result of stress and exercise is a proven way to relax and lower the amount of cortisol (which is produced in response to stress) in your system. High cortisol levels have been linked to the accumulation of harmful abdominal fat.

We are all busy and have lives outside of the gym, but we all need regular exercise to help us stay healthy, lose weight and cope with stresses of everyday life.

By making excuses to avoid exercise, all we’re doing is telling ourselves that our physical and mental health is not important and doing the dishes, driving the kids to their activities or watching mindless television is a more worthy endeavor. And nothing could be further from the truth.

Mt. SAC employees can exercise in the Wellness Center for free.
Fall hours are Monday-Thursday from 6am-9pm; Friday from 7am-3pm.

www.mtsac.edu/wellness

This article originally appeared in the NSCA’s Performance Training Journal, a publication of the National Strength and Conditioning Association. For a free subscription to the journal, browse to www.nsca-lift.org
Attention Mt. SAC Wellness Champions:
We want to hear your story!
Share your experiences and wellness journey.

Do you have a success story you want to share about improving your lifestyle through exercise and/or healthy eating? Is your department working together to get healthier? Love working out at the Wellness Center? Inspire your colleagues by sharing your story.

Please send your comments or story along with any supplemental materials (e.g., photos) to K.C. Kranz at kkranz1@mtsac.edu.

Responses will be kept anonymous if requested.

COMING SOON!

The Mountie Mile

A mile marked through the center of campus to encourage walking during your workday.

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL YOGA MONTH

Please join Lisa Matthews on Tuesday, September 23 from 1-2PM and Thursday, September 25 from 1-2PM for lunchtime yoga at Building 27A Room 108.

Space is limited. Sign up through the Professional Development website: www.mtsac.edu/POD/

Lisa’s Vinyasa flow classes are a supportive environment designed to challenge beginners and intermediate level students to reach their full potential, whatever their personal goal may be. Benefits of Yoga include body awareness, mental calmness, muscular strength and endurance, and stress reduction.

Sponsored by the Mt. SAC Employee Wellness Committee.