

Home Walking Guidelines

from the Cardiac Rehabilitation Department at St. John's Hospital

The purpose of a walking program is:

1. To increase your state of physical fitness by safe, regular, progressive exercise, and
2. To decrease your risk of another cardiac event.

You do not need to perform high intensity exercise, such as jogging or running, to improve your fitness level. We recommend low to moderate exercise, like brisk walking, to gradually improve your fitness level.

To achieve maximum benefit from cardiac rehabilitation, please follow these guidelines:

1. Pay attention to the weather. Extremes of temperature, wind and humidity will increase the work of your cardiovascular system. A range of 15 degrees Fahrenheit to 85 degrees Fahrenheit is a general guideline for safe exercise. This includes the wind-chill factor for cold weather and the heat index for hot weather. Remember 15 degrees Fahrenheit to 85 degrees Fahrenheit is a guideline. You may need to be more conservative than that.
2. Dress properly for winter walking. Layers of clothes insulate better than a heavy coat. Hats are essential to avoid large amounts of heat loss. Wear masks and/or scarves at your own discretion. Summer clothing should promote body cooling and sweat evaporation. In high humidity, sweat does not evaporate well and body cooling is poor. This may cause fatigue, light headedness, a faster heart rate and a sensation of feeling hot. Avoid pushing yourself in these conditions.
3. Wear good quality shoes. Most people agree a pair of jogging shoes is best for walking. You don't need to spend a fortune on shoes, but a good quality pair will help your comfort.
4. Where to walk. You may walk wherever you choose but avoid hills initially. If you need to include a hill in your route, try to walk it during the first part of your walk at a slower pace.

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5. When to walk. Walk whenever you want providing the weather isn't extreme. If you choose to walk after a meal, wait about one hour. If you are diabetic, it is best to walk one hour after a meal or snack.
6. Warm up before you walk. Ideally you should begin your exercise program with a warm-up session. These exercises produce a gradual increase in respiration, body temperature and heart rate. These exercises stimulate changes in your circulation and your lungs to be certain that the exercising muscles will have a good blood and oxygen supply when you begin walking. These exercises will also flex joints and stretch tendons to promote flexibility and reduce the risk of injuries. A second way to warm-up is to begin your exercise walk at a slow pace and increase your speed after about five minutes to a faster pace.
7. Consider the way you feel when you are walking. Walk at a comfortable pace so you are not too short of breath to carry on a conversation.
8. Cool down after you walk. A cool-down period after exercise helps your body return to normal. If you stop exercising without a cool down, blood may become trapped in your arms or legs making you feel dizzy, lightheaded or nauseated. These feelings can be avoided by a slow walk lasting about 3 - 5 minutes to help your circulation return to normal.
9. Things to call your doctor about. If you have any of the following symptoms during or after your walk, call your doctor:
 - A. Excessive Fatigue
 - B. Any discomfort in the chest, teeth, jaw, arms or shoulder blades.
 - C. Shortness of breath which is severe or that persists after exercise.
 - D. Light-headedness or dizziness.
 - E. Nausea and/or vomiting.
 - F. Swelling or pain in the legs.
 - G. Headache.
 - H. Any unusual joint, muscle or ligament problem.