



PACE AND TECHNIQUE

Finding your Walking Pace

Your walking pace is the speed at which you can comfortably walk. It's not important how fast you walk, but it will take time to get to know your body. All too often, beginners take the approach that exercise has to hurt in order for it to work. In the early stage of your walking program it's much better to walk too slowly than too quickly. Walking at an overly aggressive pace can lead to fatigue and possibly injury.

As you become fitter and stronger, you'll want to get your heart working and make walking a cardiovascular activity. To do this, you need to walk at a brisk pace. This is not a slow jaunt during which you can take in all the sights and sounds of the outdoors. Walking briskly means that you can speak at least two consecutive sentences without huffing and puffing, but you should be breathing heavily after speaking about four or five consecutive sentences. If you're out of breath after speaking only a couple of sentences, you need to reduce your speed. Don't be discouraged throughout this process- finding the right pace takes practice.

Good Walking Techniques

There is no such thing as a wrong way to walk, but you can certainly separate the graceful from the ungainly walking form. By incorporating good technique, you will engage your core (stomach and back) muscles, increase your speed and become a more efficient walker. Changing your form may feel awkward at first, but with a little practice you will soon feel as though you're floating along the path.

“Talk Test”

By giving yourself the “talk test” while exercising, you can easily establish whether you're exercising at your optimal level. If you can speak two consecutive sentences without gasping for air, you are probably exercising within a suitable aerobic range. If you cannot speak even one sentence without struggling to take a breath, you're likely pushing yourself too hard, and need to reduce your walking pace.

Find the right pace. An easy pace requires little effort. A *comfortable* pace means you can hold a conversation. A *brisk* pace mean you are slightly winded after speaking, but if you're huffing and puffing it means you are pushing yourself too hard, and you need to back off.



Try these tips to walk with good technique

1. Arms dictate the pace, so you want to make the most of your arm swing, whether you're walking briskly or a comfortable talking pace.
2. For a good arm swing, you want your arms to be bent at approximately 90 degrees with your hands and fingers relaxed and palms should face inward with the thumbs pointed upwards and cutting the air to chest height in front. Your arms should swing easily and freely backwards to where the elbow reaches to the back such that the thumb brushes just past the hip.
3. When you're walking at a talking pace you should stand nice and tall, with square shoulders, arms swinging freely in an upwards and backwards motion and your stride should be wide with a strong heel-toe motion.
4. When you're walking at a brisk pace, your arm motion should be the same as described above but instead of swinging freely, there is a conscious effort to drive the arms forward and back. With a brisk pace, the thumbs swing higher in front almost to shoulder height instead of chest height, and the elbows drive further back as high as shoulder height so that the thumb and hand are well past the hip, depending on the comfort and flexibility of the participant.
5. During a brisk-paced walk, you want to stand tall and square. Open the chest to maximize breathing. The biggest difference, as described in the point above, is that the arms are driving the pace. When the arms are activated, the legs move with them! With a brisker pace, the torso tips slightly forward, the heel-toe action becomes stronger as the knee straightens and almost locks, while the hips swing left and right to accommodate the straightened knee and strong heel placement. Suggest participants consciously utilize their butt muscles to propel themselves forward as well. This is a "near race-walking technique" that comes naturally when the pace picks up.

Stay Relaxed

One of the best ways to improve your walking performance and overall enjoyment is to focus on staying relaxed. At various times throughout your walk, it's a good idea to go through a mental checklist to see if your head, shoulders, arms, hands, and hips, are relaxed.

Walking up Hills

- Lean forward into the hill, starting from your waist.
- Keep your stomach and back muscle taut.
- Focus your eyes only a few feet in front of you (avoid searching for the top of the hill).
- Shorten your stride and use small, quick steps.
- Pump your arms – as always, your arms will dictate the pace.
- Focus on rolling through your foot and pushing off with the balls of your feet.
- Be patient with yourself - it will take time to build your strength and confidence. After a few hills, you will begin to feel stronger and you'll love the feeling of reaching the top!

(Continued...)

Dress for the Weather

Generally, when you first start your walk you should feel a little chilly. Body heat generated through exercise is amazing. Within only a short period of time you will warm up. You might even have to take off your outer layer and wrap it around your waist.