



## These Shoes are Made for Walking

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Spring is in the air and your walking shoes are itching to get out! Walking is a way to enjoy the weather, exercise for free, and reward you with great health benefits.

The benefits of walking include: lowering cholesterol and blood pressure, managing your weight and diabetes, improving mood and staying fit. For those who have joint aches and pain, walking is a form of low-impact exercising that allows you to be in charge of time, distance, and speed. All it takes is routine walking to obtain these benefits.

When starting a walking program you want to prepare yourself for possible injuries such as blisters or muscle pain. Getting the proper footwear that is comfortable and has appropriate support will help ease you into a program. Other important factors to remember are:

- Clothing (dress in layers if the weather is questionable and bright colors or reflective tape if walking at night),
- Proper posture (chin up and shoulders back, swing arms and make sure your heels hit the pavement first then shift your weight forward to roll off your toes),
- Warming up (walk at a slower pace for 5 minutes then stretch, holding each for 20-30 seconds)
- Cooling down (decrease speed for the last 5 minutes and repeat stretches).

Stretches to include are calf, quadriceps and hamstrings; keeping these muscles warm will help prevent injury.

If you are new to the walking scene, begin slowly and keep it short. For example, start walking daily for 10 to 15 minutes increasing time as you feel comfortable. Create a daily journal or chart to track your progress; provide information such as time, distance, heart rate to monitor intensity and set goals. Having a record can keep you motivated and continue to challenge yourself. Staying motivated can be hard at times, getting a friend or family member to join you will help keep it fun and safe. If you slip up a day or two don't be too hard on yourself. Remember tomorrow is a new day, revisit your goals, and keep walking!