Activity guide – Walking
A guide for people wanting to learn more about walking

Walking is the most popular sport and recreation activity among New Zealand adults. Approximately two out of three adults aged 16 years and over walked for sport and recreation in 2007/08 (SPARC 2007/08 Active NZ Survey).

Walking can contribute towards the adult recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on five or more days per week, and, importantly, reduces the time you spend sitting down. Guidelines on physical activity for all ages can be found at www.health.govt.nz

Benefits of walking
Walking is ideal for people of all ages and fitness levels, even those who have been inactive. It can be as easy or as hard as you want it to be – but a brisk pace for 10 minutes or more produces more benefits.

Walking offers multiple health benefits and is relatively easy on the muscles and joints – it also carries a low risk of injury.

Regular walking can help to reduce the risk of certain health-related conditions, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and certain cancers, and improves your:
• heart rate and circulation
• muscle strength (which is essential for doing everyday activities)
• bone strength, and decreases your risk of osteoporosis (which causes brittle bones)
• balance, which can help to reduce the risk and severity of falls
• energy expenditure, which burns kilojoules and helps you lose or maintain a healthy weight
• overall health and wellbeing
• self-esteem
• stress levels.

Green Prescriptions
A Green Prescription www.health.govt.nz is a health practitioner’s written advice to an adult patient. Green prescriptions encourage and support the person to help manage certain health conditions, such as weight problems, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, through physical activity and counselling.

In addition to Green Prescriptions, the Green Prescription Active Families programme aims to increase physical activity for children, young people and their families.
**Social walking**

Walking is a great activity when it is done alone, but can be even better when done in groups. If you like to socialise, walk with friends or whānau. If you don’t have someone to walk with, join a local walking group. Contact your regional sports trust [www.sportnz.org.nz](http://www.sportnz.org.nz) for more information.

**A step-by-step approach to walking**

1. Make it a habit by choosing a time that suits you – then you are more likely to stick to it.
2. Start slowly and increase the length and intensity of your walks as you feel more comfortable.
3. Be flexible. If you miss a walk, don’t worry – just walk again when you can.
4. Be safe. Be Sun Smart, wear appropriate clothing and walk in safe, well lit areas [www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)
5. Avoid boredom by changing your routine every now and then. Try walking tracks, parks and hills.
6. Breathe deeply and rhythmically. Try breathing in for four paces and out for four.
7. Using a calendar or diary to track your progress may help you stay motivated.
8. Walking with friends, family, partner or a dog may help you stay focused on walking.
9. Be patient. It may take up to six weeks to feel the benefits of regular walking.

If you have any concerns about walking, your local health practitioner will be able to support your walking routine.

**Starting off**

Walking is a great way to fit physical activity into a busy day and can be easily added to your normal routine. Some examples include:

- taking the stairs instead of the lift
- walking the dog before or after work.

Walk at your own pace, especially at the beginning. All you need is a supportive pair of shoes.

Make walking a habit by establishing an enjoyable routine – it will only become a habit if it is fun and suits your lifestyle – for instance, if you are a morning person, try walking before breakfast instead of after dinner.

**Exploring your local area**

New Zealand is full of great places to walk, including:

- inner city walks
- local bush walks
- nature walks
- harbour front walks
- walks through various local and regional parks.

Take time to explore as many walks as you can in your local area, while recognising and respecting the cultural importance of sacred land to Māori. Tangata whenua have a special connection with the land and place cultural significance on roto (lakes), awa (rivers) and maunga (mountains), which all have mana (spiritual status).

Early ancestors of te iwi Māori walked the length and breadth of the country naming mountains, hills, rivers, lakes, creeks and valleys. All names having significant meaning for Māori – they tell a story, record history and leave an indelible imprint on the land and its surroundings.
Te Araroa

Te Araroa – The Long Pathway is a 3000 km route that travels from Cape Reinga in the far north of New Zealand, to Bluff in the far south. Te Araroa takes in New Zealand’s spectacular scenery, including beaches, forests, volcanoes and cities www.teararoa.org.nz

Visit your local council website www.localcouncils.govt.nz for ideas on other walks in your area.

Picking up the pace

Brisk walking is good for a healthy heart and lungs – it offers all the benefits of other forms of aerobic activity, but with a lower risk of injury. It is an extremely effective workout for the heart and rivals running as a kilojoule burner.

When you increase your speed, technique becomes more important – the correct arm swing, stride, breathing and posture will make it easier to walk quickly. If you are ready to break out of a stroll, you may like to take some technique classes. Find out about classes at your regional sports trust www.sportnz.org.nz

Nordic walking

Nordic walking (walking with specially designed poles) www.nordicwalking.net.nz started in Scandinavia as a training plan for cross-country skiers during the summer months. The poles mean Nordic walking uses more muscles than regular walking, so you burn more kilojoules per hour (approximately 1675 compared with 1172).

Nordic walking may be beneficial for older people, and people with certain health conditions, such as Parkinson’s, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease and obesity.

Tramping

If you are feeling more adventurous you can build up to more rigorous walks through regional and national parks and on to iconic tramps like the Queen Charlotte Track, Abel Tasman Coast Track, Lake Waikaremoana track, Tongariro Northern Circuit and Milford Track.

The more rigorous walks and tramps will require more planning and preparation, as well as specialist equipment to ensure your safety. When planning a tramp, never underestimate the conditions and stay within your limits. The Outdoor Safety Code is a good resource to follow www.adventuresmart.org.nz
Related websites

AA Travel: 101 Must Dos: Get Active: Walking tracks
www.aatravel.co.nz
Information on must-do walking tracks in New Zealand.

AdventureSmart
www.adventuresmart.org.nz
Tips, links and advice to help you plan and prepare your outdoors adventure.

Department of Conservation: Great Walks
www.doc.govt.nz
Information on New Zealand’s nine Great Walks.

Living Streets Aotearoa
www.livingstreets.org.nz
An organisation promoting walking-friendly communities.

Mountain Safety Council
www.mountainsafety.org.nz
Safety tips, resources and training courses to ensure you stay safe outdoors.

Sport New Zealand
www.sportnz.org.nz
The government organisation responsible for sports and recreation.

Tourism New Zealand
www.newzealand.com
Advice on things to do in New Zealand, including ideas for walking or tramping.

Walking Access Mapping System
www.wams.org.nz
The Walking Access Mapping System shows publicly accessible land across New Zealand. It’s free, includes topographic and aerial maps of the whole country, and also includes recreational points of interest that have been uploaded by government agencies, councils, clubs and other outdoor-related organisations.

Walking New Zealand
www.walkingnewzealand.co.nz
A magazine for walkers. Their website includes a list of walking groups.

10,000 Steps Walking Program
www.vitalityworks.co.nz
A workplace team walking challenge.

This information sheet was produced together with:

ACC
www.acc.co.nz

NZ Transport Agency
www.nzta.govt.nz

Sport New Zealand
www.sportnz.org.nz

Toi Tangata
http://toitangata.co.nz