



Irish Heart  
Foundation

Let's go  
walking



Seirbhís Sláinte  
Níos Fearr  
á Forbairt

Building a  
Better Health  
Service

# Contact Details

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**[www.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)**

**Get Ireland Walking**

**[www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie)**

**Get Ireland Active**

**[www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie)**

**Local Sports Partnerships**

**[www.sportireland.ie](http://www.sportireland.ie)**

**National Trails Office**

**[www.irishtrails.ie](http://www.irishtrails.ie)**

**Mountaineering Ireland**

**[www.mountaineering.ie](http://www.mountaineering.ie)**

**RSA**

**[www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)**

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# Introduction

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## *Irish Heart Foundation*

We are the nation's heart and stroke charity. Our mission is to affect positive change in the lifestyles of Irish people, to achieve better outcomes for those affected by heart disease and stroke and to challenge when the health of our nation is put at risk. We empower people to live longer, healthier lives.

## *Slí na Sláinte Programme*

The Slí na Sláinte (Path to Health) Programme is a health promotion initiative of Irish Heart Foundation which aims to encourage people of all ages and abilities to walk for health and leisure. The Programme has two core components, to provide training and develop walking routes.

**Get more info at:  
[irishheart.ie](http://irishheart.ie)**

## Community Walking Leader Training

Walking Leader Training is primarily aimed at people wishing to lead a walking group or promote walking in the community or workplace. The course comprises of a weekend of training and a leader task to try out your new walking leader skills. Participants will gain a greater understanding of the health benefits of walking. They will learn to develop and lead a walking session for mixed fitness levels; receive advice on starting a new walking group; and gain a greater understanding of posture, technique, stretching and safety issues to ensure a successful walk.

## Get into Walking Workshop

The Get into Walking Workshop aims to help the individual get the maximum health benefits from their walk, covering topics such as posture, technique and intensity.

## Slí na Sláinte routes

There are over 400 Slí na Sláinte routes in towns, villages, GAA clubs, schools and workplaces countrywide. The Slí routes are typically 2km — 5km in length and use solid terrain (footpaths, roads etc). The routes are signposted with map boards, kilometre markers and directional arrows allowing people to keep track of the distance they walk.

*There are over 400 Slí na Sláinte routes in towns, villages, GAA clubs, schools and workplaces countrywide*

# Why walking? Walking for health

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that:

**“Health is a complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing”**

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**Walking is a near perfect form of exercise particularly for those who are currently inactive**

- It is accessible to all regardless of age or ability
- The time and distance can be built up gradually as the individual becomes fitter
- It is free, requires no special equipment or expensive membership fees
- It allows for social interaction while exercising
- Can be easily incorporated into people’s daily lives
- Has a low injury risk
- Is family-friendly

## Physical health

### Heart health

Over 20% of coronary heart disease and 10% of stroke are due to physical inactivity. When you walk at a moderate intensity you give your heart, lungs and blood vessels their own special workout, training these vital organs to work harder and more efficiently for you. As a result, you can help reduce your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

**Over 20% of coronary heart disease and 10% of stroke are due to physical inactivity**

## Joint mobility

People who suffer joint discomfort can benefit from regular walking because walking strengthens the muscles, ligaments and cartilage around your joints. Walking can also increase your joint mobility.

## Bone strength

Bones become susceptible to injury and degeneration as you get older. Some activities, like jogging, are high-impact in nature and subject your bones to a lot of stress and strain. Walking is much kinder on your bones as the impact is at a low level.

## Muscles

Walking strengthens and tones the muscles of the calves, thighs, ankles and feet. Fitness walking techniques such as power walking, stride walking and Nordic Walking involve greater use of the upper body and are a great way of toning not only the legs, but also the arms, shoulders, stomach, hips and buttocks.

## Weight management

Walking can be an effective way to aid weight loss combined with a healthy diet. To lose weight you need to do at least 60 — 75 minutes of moderate intensity walking every day.

## Energy levels

The fatigue we feel in everyday life is often a mixture of mental and physical exhaustion, walking can help alleviate both.

# Mental health

## Stress

Stress is a common by-product of modern-day living. There are many expensive solutions for stress, tension and anxiety on offer. But we have a solution that doesn't come in a pill or liquid form and is totally free of side effects. Walking! Research has found that regular walkers are better able to cope with whatever problems modern-day living throws at them.

## Depression

Research shows that exercise influences the release and up-take of chemicals known as endorphins in your brain that make you feel good. Staying active can lift your mood, reduce stress, help you deal with negative emotions and even help with anxiety and reduce the risk of depression.



Staying active  
can lift your  
mood and  
reduce stress

## Self esteem

Studies have found that people who participate in physical activity typically have greater physical and overall self-esteem.

# Social health

While walking is not a team sport you can still reap social benefits from a regular walking routine. Walking with a friend or neighbour helps maintain existing friendships while joining a walking group allows you to make new friends.

Walking festivals and walking holidays are becoming more popular both in Ireland and abroad and can be a great way to meet people while discovering new surroundings.



# How much? How often?

The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland state that: **“Adults should engage in at least 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity activity on 5 days a week (or accumulate 150 minutes a week)”**.

*Department of Health and Children, Health Service Executive (2009)*

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## How the guidelines relate to walking

**Being physically active for our health involves different types of activity**

1. Aerobic/moderate intensity activity
2. Muscle strengthening activity
3. Balance activity
4. Mobility/flexibility activity

It is possible to incorporate all 4 components of fitness into a walking session to maximise the health benefits.

### **Aerobic/moderate intensity activity**

Aerobic/moderate intensity activity uses your heart, lungs and large muscles over a continuous period of time. At least 30 minutes a day of aerobic/moderate intensity activity on 5 days a week is recommended. Walking at a brisk pace is a great example of aerobic/moderate intensity activity.

### **Muscle strengthening activity**

Muscle strengthening exercises should be incorporated 2 or 3 days a week and work all major muscle groups. Muscle strengthening exercises help keep bones and muscles strong. It is possible to incorporate muscle strengthening activity into your walking session.

## Balance activity

Balance activities can help you maintain balance and stability especially as we age, these can easily be included in your walk.

## Mobility/flexibility activity

Mobility/flexibility exercises give more freedom of movement for both physical activities and for everyday life. Including a quick warm up and warm down as part of a walking session will improve mobility/flexibility.

Aerobic activities	Muscle strengthening activities	Balance activities	Mobility/flexibility activities
Brisk walking	Lunge	Backwards and sideways walking	Calf stretch
Walking up an incline	Squat	Walking with one foot directly in front of the other	Chest stretch
Swimming	Digging or lifting	Yoga	Back stretch

## 10,000 steps a day

Keeping track of steps can be a great way to check how active you currently are and allow you track any increase in your activity levels. 10,000 is the recommended number of steps to take in a day which is approximately 8km but all steps count not just those you accumulate on a walk. So make some simple changes; take the stairs instead of the lift, get off the bus a stop early or park further away from your destination. Steps can be recorded with a simple step counter, a wearable tracking device and many smart phones also have a built in trackers.

While all steps count towards the 10,000 not all steps are equal in terms of the intensity. The National Physical Activity Guidelines state that we should accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity throughout the day. At least 30 minutes of our stepping should be at a moderate intensity.

# Start walking

A walking session can incorporate 4 important components of physical activity; aerobic, muscle strengthening, balance and flexibility to create an all over health enhancing activity session. An ideal walking session should involve 3 parts:

## The warm up, The walk, The warm down

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### *The warm up*

Warming up before we walk gently prepares our body for exercise and helps prevent injury. The warm up should involve 2 parts. Some mobilising exercises followed by a period gentle strolling. Doing a warm up at the start of your walk will:

- Introduce synovial fluid into the joints
- Increase body temperature and heart rate
- Warm and loosen our ligaments and muscles
- Provide an opportunity to incorporate some mobility/flexibility activities into your walking session

#### **Mobility/flexibility exercises**

- For each exercise mobilise slowly and gently with no jerking or snapping movements
- Start with small movements and increase as you warm up. Repeat 8 — 10 times

**Warming up before we walk gently prepares our body for exercise and helps prevent injury**

# Mobility/flexibility exercises

## Shoulders (Shoulder circle)

- Place hands on hips and circle the shoulders forward
- Repeat in a backwards movement



## Spine (Trunk twister)

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart and soften the knees slightly
- Rotate the spine to the left and then to the right
- Start with small turns
- Increase to larger twists, looking behind



## Hips (Hip stirrer)

- Raise one leg slightly off the ground
- Rotate the whole leg from the hip in a circular movement
- Repeat on the other leg



## Knees (Knee bender)

- Raise the heel of one foot towards the buttocks and lower
- Repeat on the other leg



## Ankles (Ankle turner)

- Lift one foot slightly off the ground
- Rotate the ankle in a circular movement clockwise, then counter clockwise
- Repeat with other ankle



# The walk


The length of the walk can vary depending on how much time you have, in keeping with the national physical activity guideline we should walk for at least 30 minutes at a moderate intensity, this can be accumulated from shorter sessions throughout the day but sessions of greater than 10 minutes are best.

## For example:

- A 60 minute walk including 30 minutes at moderate intensity and 30 minutes at a lower intensity
- A 30 minute walk at moderate intensity
- Two 30 minute walks, 15 minutes of each at moderate intensity

## In order to make walking moderate intensity we can:

- Increase the pace
- Add an incline
- Add in extra pieces of work for short bursts like 'Step ups' or 'Knee taps'



*In keeping with  
the national physical  
activity guideline  
we should walk  
for at least  
30 minutes a day*

# Aerobic/moderate intensity activity

## Increase the pace

- Incorporate periods of increased speed, on the spot or on the move
- While walking fold the arms at the elbow and vigorously swing your arms, notice how your step speeds up



## Add an incline

- While walking take the opportunity to walk up any slopes or steps you come across
- You can walk up and down for a few minutes before continuing on your journey
- As you walk use your arms to drive you upward



## Knee tapping

- Walking on the spot
- Progress to lift your knees higher as you step, tapping each knee with the opposite hand
- Use large arm movements and high knees to increase the intensity



## Step ups

- If you come across a step on your walk you can use it to up the intensity
- Step up with the right foot, bring up the left foot
- Step down with the right foot, bring down the left foot
- You can increase the speed, lift the knees higher and swing the arms to increase the intensity further
- Change the lead foot regularly



# Muscle strengthening activity

As you walk you can also incorporate some muscle strengthening and balance exercises.

## For each exercise:

- Use support (e.g. fence, park bench, signpost) for balance if necessary
- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and knees soft
- Maintain good posture (head up and back straight) throughout the movement
- Do the movements slowly in each direction but do not hold at any point
- Continue with repetitions until the muscles involved feel slightly tired
- Continue to breathe normally — avoid holding your breath

## Lunge

- Stand tall
- Take a long step forward and dip the back knee towards the ground
- Then raise and return to the start position
- Repeat on other leg



## High Knees

- Stand tall
- Lift one knee to the highest position and lower
- Repeat on other leg



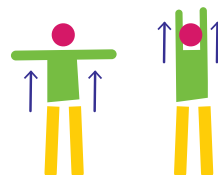
## Squat

- Stand tall, feet hip-width apart
- Looking forward, lower buttocks to a seated position
- Rise to a standing position
- You should be able to see your toes throughout the movement



## Shoulder movement

- Stand tall with both arms by your side, palms facing in
- Raise arms to shoulder level, bend elbows slightly and face palms to the sky
- Push both arms up to full height, straight above head
- Lower to shoulders, then back to side



# Balance activity

The exercises below will help improve and maintain better balance.

## For each exercise:

- Use support (e.g. fence, park bench) for balance if necessary
- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and knees soft
- Maintain good posture (head up and back straight) throughout the movement
- Do the movements slowly in each direction but do not hold at any point
- Continue with repetitions until the muscles involved feel slightly tired
- Continue to breathe normally — avoid holding your breath

## Posture check

- **Head:** Raise chin and focus on the horizon
- **Shoulders:** Lift shoulders, roll then up, back and down to a relaxed position

## Clock stepping

- Imagine a clock face in front of you on the ground
- From a standing position take a long step forward to place the right foot at '12 o'clock', then return to start position
- Repeat with the right foot to '1, 2 and 3 o'clock'
- Use the left foot to step to '12, 11, 10 and 9 o'clock'
- Take long steps, turn the hip out when stepping and bend the lead knee slightly each time

## Tight rope walking

- Walk forward placing heel to toe as if on a tightrope
- To make it more challenging you could try stepping very slowly, walk backwards or lift the lead knee high before placing the foot down

## Walk in different directions

- Walk sideways, backwards, on tip toes, on heels or in a zip-zag pattern




# The warm down

**A warm down should involve 2 components, a short period walking at a more relaxed pace followed by some stretching. The purpose of a warm down is to:**

- Allow the heart rate to slow down
- The body temperature to reduce
- Helps prevent stiff, sore muscles
- Incorporate some mobility/flexibility activity into a walking session

The stretching exercises can be performed from both a seated and standing position. For each exercise ease slowly to the point of mild tension, do not bounce or jerk, hold for up to 10 seconds and repeat up to 3 times.



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# Stretching Standing Version

## Hamstring Stretch

- Place left heel forward and hands on the right (opposite) thigh for support
- Bend right knee and push bum backwards to feel a slight tension in the hamstrings
- Repeat on other leg



## Calf Stretch

- Place left foot forward and keep both feet pointing forward
- Keep right heel on the ground and bend the left knee until slight tension is felt in the right calf
- Repeat on other leg



## Back Stretch

- Raise arms to shoulder level and clasp hands with palms facing forward
- Slowly push palms forward
- Lower chin to chest to feel tension along upper back and shoulders



## Chest stretch

- Place palms on buttocks
- Ease elbows backwards and push chest forward to feel tension in upper chest and shoulders



# Stretching Seated Version

Start sitting upright at front edge of seat — feet forward and apart.

## Hamstring Stretch

- Place left heel forward
- Place hands on the right (opposite) thigh
- Lean forward with back straight and head up until slight tension is felt in right calf
- Repeat on other leg



## Calf Stretch

- Place right foot forward and slide heel forward and pull toes backward
- Place hands on left (opposite) thigh
- Lean forward with back straight and head up until slight tension is felt in right calf
- Repeat on other leg



## Back Stretch

- Raise arms to shoulder level and clasp hands with palms facing forward
- Lean forward and push palms forward
- Lower chin to chest to feel tension along upper back and shoulders



## Chest stretch

- Place palms on buttocks
- Ease elbows backwards
- Push chest forward to feel tension in upper chest and shoulders



# Keep walking

## *Ideas to keep walking*

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### 1. Do a walking challenge

**Irish Heart Foundation:** Walk or Step Challenge & Time or Distance Challenge.

**Get Ireland Walking:** 21 Day Challenge.

### 2. Join a walking group

**Irish Heart Foundation:** Find one of the many walking groups set up by trained walking leaders in your area.

**Get Ireland Walking:** Browse the county directory to find a variety of walking groups.

**Local Sports Partnership:** Find out information on local groups in your county.

### 3. Start your own walking group

**Irish Heart Foundation:** Attend one of the Community Walking Leader Training courses.

**Mountaineering Ireland:** Attend one of the Lowland or Mountain Leader courses.

**Get Ireland Walking:** Register for Walking Leader insurance.

**Local Sports Partnership:** Find information on training and receive support promoting your group.

### 4. Explore new walking routes

**Irish Heart Foundation:** Find maps of 220 community based Slí na Sláinte routes.

**National Trails Office:** Discover maps and descriptions of all recreational trails in Ireland.

## 5. Discover new types of walking

**Local Sports Partnerships/Get Active Ireland:** Learn about different types of walking on offer in your area such as Nordic Walking or Indoor Fitness Walking.

## 6. Find out what's happening in my area

**Local Sports Partnerships/Get Active Ireland:** Learn about local walking events and festivals.

# Walking gear

**Unlike other activities, walking does not require hi-tech, expensive equipment. To start, all you need is a comfortable pair of walking shoes but you may consider investing in some of the following as you become more serious about walking:**

### Shoes

Walking shoes are designed specifically to suit the mechanics of walking and will be well cushioned on the heel area. Your shoes should provide good shock absorption to protect your heels and the joints of your ankles, knees and hips. They should have a good outer sole with a spacious toe-box.

### Socks

Socks are important to prevent blistering. If you wear one pair try turning them inside out to keep the seams away from your foot. Two light pairs are better than one — the extra layer reduces the risk of developing blisters.

### Upper body clothing

**The 3 L's: loose, light, layers** will help you move freely and allow you to easily remove and replace items as you warm up or cool down.

## The 3 Ws

- **A wicker layer** — This is the layer against the skin and should be made of a wicking material which takes perspiration away from the skin to the outside of the garment.
- **A warmth layer** — A light fleece is best.
- **A water-resistant or waterproof layer** — A lightweight, breathable, rainproof garment which can be worn or folded into a pouch.

## Cap and gloves

In cold weather a hat and gloves will add to the comfort of your walk.

## Backpack

A small light-weight backpack can be useful to carry a range of items such as a snack, water bottle, mobile phone, rain coat, etc.

## High visibility (hi-viz) vests

It is strongly recommended that you wear hi-viz clothing while walking especially on dark evenings. You can register on the Road Safety Authorities website to receive free hi-viz gear at [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

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If you would like to sign up to our newsletter please contact [info@irishheart.ie](mailto:info@irishheart.ie)

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Mon—Fri: 9am—5pm, Thur until 7pm