Mayo Clinic – Walking Groups

**Enjoy the benefits of a walking group**

You already know the health benefits of walking. Here's what else you get when you walk with others:

* Safety
* Socialization
* Accountability
* Friendship
* Motivation

**Recruit members for your walking group**

To start a walking group, just spread the word. Talk up your walking group among your family members, friends and neighbors. You might be surprised to find that you're surrounded by people who are ready to lace up their walking shoes — and hold each other accountable for regular exercise.

Maybe you'd prefer recruiting colleagues. Ask your employer about having a friendly workplace competition. Challenge those in your work group to a **pedometer contest**, for example. The group that achieves the most steps takes home bragging rights or a simple prize. Or, keep track of the number of minutes of activity for the group and see who comes out on top each week.

**Get your walking group organized**

Once you've recruited members for your walking group, hold a kickoff meeting. Collect email addresses, phone numbers and other contact details, so you can stay in touch about workouts and keep each other motivated.

Then discuss the details of your walking group, such as:

* How often to walk
* The distance to cover
* The speed to walk
* When and where to meet
* Whether to walk indoors or outdoors
* What to do in case of bad weather
* The route to take

Of course, your walking group may need some flexibility to accommodate weather, work schedules, illness or other factors that may arise. If you've recruited lots of people, consider breaking into smaller walking groups, perhaps based on fitness level, fitness goals, availability or other factors.

On the other hand, if your walking group members are at different fitness levels, you may be able to encourage and motivate each other by walking together. Staying motivated is one of the key factors in sticking with your health and fitness goals for the long term. So lean on your walking buddies for support, especially on those days when you feel like skipping your workout.

**Maintain momentum for your walking group**

Once your group's walking routine is established, look for ways to maintain and boost motivation. You might choose a name for your walking group, design a group logo, enter **charity walking events**, or set group goals to increase walking time or intensity.

The camaraderie you experience in a walking group and the shared fitness success can help you walk your way to better health.

**Setting and reaching step goals with a pedometer**

A pedometer provides customized feedback about your activity level. It can serve as a strong motivator to keep moving. And it can help you track your progress over time.

Use these tips to make your pedometer a partner in your activity program:

* **Establish your baseline steps.** When you first get your pedometer, wear it throughout the day for three straight days as you go about your routine activities at home or work. Add up the total number of steps for each of the three days and then divide that total by three. This gives you a baseline number of steps, or average, that can serve as a launching point for the step goals you set.
* **Set short-term step goals.** Once you know how many steps you generally take on an average day, you can set some short-term activity goals using your pedometer. For instance, say you normally take about 2,000 steps a day while going about your normal routine. Set a short-term goal of adding on another 500 to 1,000 steps a day for a week by incorporating a planned walking program into your schedule. You can either do it all at once or break your walking into 10-minute chunks of time to accommodate your schedule. When you meet a short-term goal, add a new one.
* **Set long-term step goals.** Think about your overall fitness and activity goals. Your short-term goals are the building blocks to these long-term goals. A long-term goal may be walking 10,000 steps a day, or about five miles (eight kilometers), several times a week as part of your new daily routine. You may also want to set a goal of walking faster as your fitness level improves. Keep in mind that the Department of Health and Human Services recommends that, in general, healthy adults get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity.
* **Track your progress.** To see how you're doing, monitor your progress over time. Your pedometer may or may not have a memory function to track your steps on a weekly or monthly basis. You can choose to use that feature or record your steps in a log of your own making. Or upload the information digitally to your computer or mobile device. Tracking your progress can help you see whether you're meeting your goals and when it may be time to set fresh goals.

Remember to talk to your doctor before starting a new fitness program if you have any health issues, have been inactive or are very overweight. Whatever your fitness goals, take them one step at a time. Use your pedometer to set and track realistic goals based on your fitness level and any health issues you may have. Use your pedometer to keep it fun, interesting and challenging. Better health and fitness may be just steps away.

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