

GET  
IRELAND  
WALKING 

WALK THE WALK  
*Workbook*

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Get Ireland Walking, an initiative of Sport Ireland, supported by Healthy Ireland and delivered by Mountaineering Ireland, was established in 2013 with the core aim to **unify and enable the efforts of all people, agencies and organisations interested in promoting and participating in walking.**



## Get Ireland Walking **Vision**

**A vibrant culture of walking throughout Ireland.**



## Get Ireland Walking **Mission**

**To empower and support people to choose to walk more often for recreation, transport, and health as part of their everyday lives.**



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# Introduction

**Walking is such an ordinary, everyday activity, most people take it for granted.** Walking is a tool for better health and wellbeing for the body and mind as well as for our environment.

This booklet aims to help you make the choice to walk more often for health, wellbeing, or to get fit, by sharing tips and tricks and providing the motivation and support to do so.

**This booklet also highlights existing resources** such as walking groups and supports for establishing walking groups.

**Together we can  
“Get Ireland Walking”**



**Remember** to get the go-ahead from your doctor before you start any exercise programme.



## Why put a focus on walking?



## Health benefits of walking

The health and wellbeing benefits of walking are vast and can be broadly subdivided into:



**Social**



**Mental**



**Physical**

The following pages will outline the benefits of walking using each of these three headings. We'll discuss how walking can encourage a healthy mind, body and spirit. We'll also take a look at how walking can contribute towards preventing physiological and neurological conditions such as heart disease and dementia.

**“ Walking is man’s best medicine! ”**

- Hippocrates

# Social Wellbeing

## Connecting people

While walking is something that can be done on your own it is also acknowledged that participating in walking or any activity in a group helps with our social health. **It may even be the cup of tea following the walk that has the highest social health impact!**



Walking as part of a group is a great way to improve social health and wellbeing. Check out [www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie) to find a walking group near you. There are all sorts of walking groups to suit your abilities.

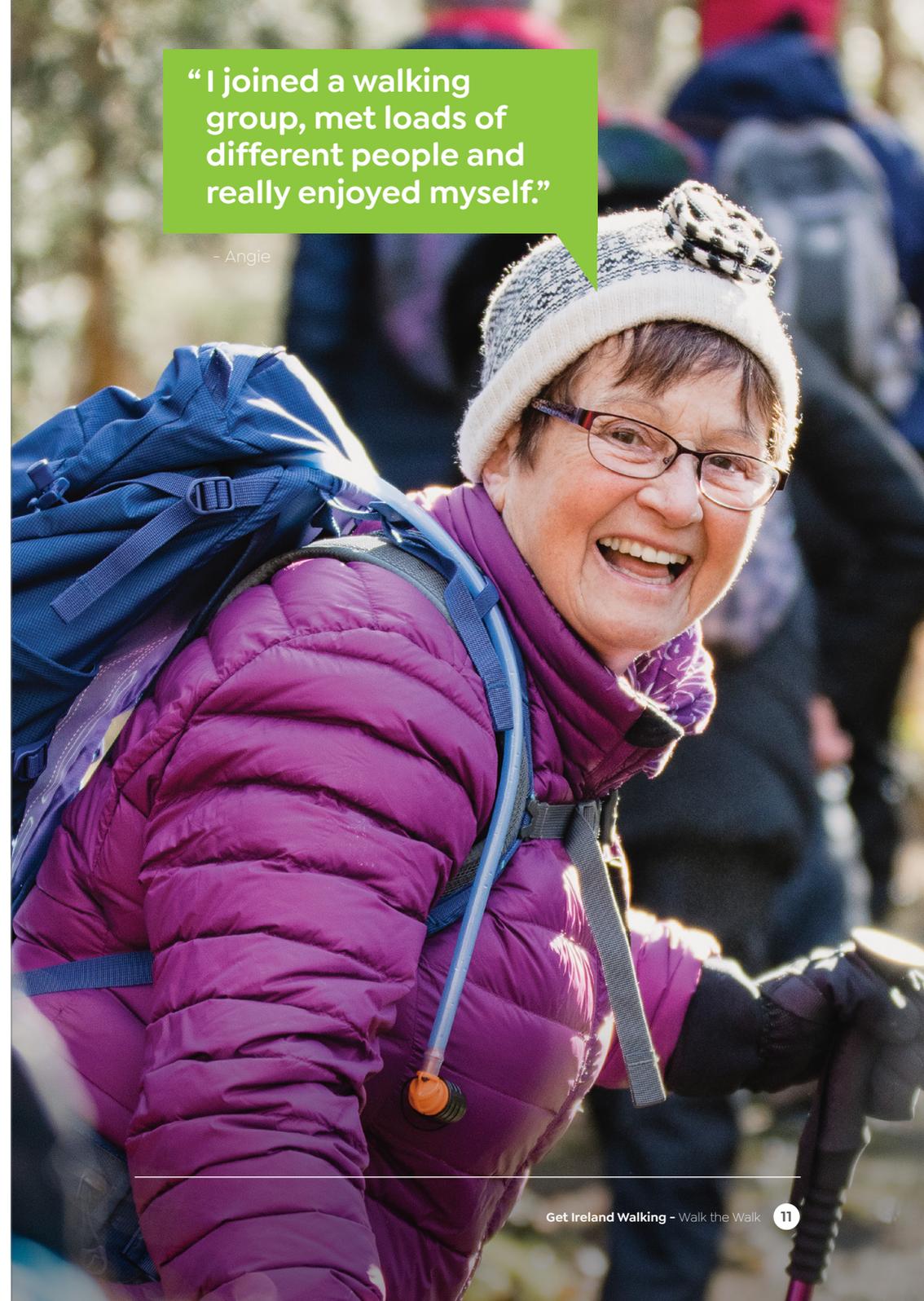
If you are starting exercise it is important to start slowly and gradually build up the pace and intensity over time and as your body allows.

## How much walking should I do?

The International and National guidelines state that for better health we should: accumulate 150 minutes of physical activity over a week as well as incorporating strength, balance and mobility exercise.

Top tip! 

Some physical activity is better than none, more is better than some, and any amount of physical activity you do gains some health benefits.



“I joined a walking group, met loads of different people and really enjoyed myself.”

- Angie

# Mental Wellbeing

## For a happy head!

It is known that regular activity such as walking can boost our mental health and wellbeing. Anxiety and depression can result in feelings of stress and despair. We know that even small amounts of activity including walking can help alleviate these feelings. Being active helps your mood, helps relieve stress and helps us cope with the demands of life.



### Did you know walking is also good for your brain health?

Walking at a pace that leaves you a little out of breath reduces your risk of developing dementia.

**“When I feel low, walking outdoors helps to lift my spirits”**

- Gerry

## 21 Day Walking Challenge

Use the **21 Day Walking Challenge on page 39** to record how you feel after your walk every day. This will give you an idea of how your mood can change during and after your walks.





# Mental Wellbeing

## Natural spaces

**Walking in green & blue spaces has added value for our mental wellbeing.** New evidence\* solidifies our knowledge that walking in “green or blue” outdoor spaces including forests, beaches or parks, results in greater wellbeing benefits associated with walking than walking indoors or in urban spaces.

\* Woodlands for Health Evaluation Report 2020

### The additional benefits of walking in natural environments include:

- Reduced stress
- Improved wellbeing
- Improved mood
- Improved attention
- Positive emotions
- Increased self-esteem



**You don't need to venture into the forest to find a green space, you could always** check out your local park and amenities. Check out [www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie)

# Physical wellbeing

Physical health is sometimes the first thing we think of when we think of health, however it is just one aspect of our overall health and wellbeing. Physical wellbeing includes the following components:



## Heart + lungs

**Regular activity and walking helps our heart and lungs remain healthy.** Physical activity is known to decrease your risk of heart disease.



## Joints

**As we get older our joints start to feel as if they are seizing up.**

Think of your joints as old door hinges that need greasing up. One way of greasing up our joints is to move them!

When we move our joints (eg. knees, hips, shoulders) we stimulate the flow of synovial fluid which is the WD40 for our joints. We also know that regular activity and walking strengthens the muscles and ligaments that are stabilising our joints.

**“ I feel fitter after starting walking more regularly and my breathing is better than it was ”**

- Bernadette



## Bones

**Bones need to be constantly used to ensure that they stay as strong as they can be.** With age our bones naturally start to get weaker but we can offset this decline by trying to build weight bearing activities into our day.

Walking is a gentle form of weight bearing activity and will serve to maintain the bone density needed to keep our bones strong and healthy.



## Muscles

**Walking is an ideal way to strengthen muscles involved in walking (mainly leg muscles) as well as many muscles that help maintain good posture (core muscles).**

Using muscles by walking regularly, helps blood circulation throughout the body.

# Walking journal

Before you make plans and goals it is good to get an idea of how much walking you do. Use this walking journal to find out how much walking you currently do.



Only record the times when you are walking for at least 10 minutes.

Day	Walk descriptions	Walks (time walking in minutes)	Total time (time walking in minutes)
Sample Day	Walked the children to school. Walked to and from the local shop.	15 minutes 16 minutes	31 minutes
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			
Total time walking over the week			



One of the great things about walking is that you really don't need much gear... Well; maybe a raincoat is all you need for our Irish weather!

# Are you doing enough?

Look at how much walking you have done over the last week.

**Have you achieved the optimum 150 minutes?**

YES

**Well done!** Walking more is even better for your health. Do your best to make your walking brisk to get the best results. Why not try the 21 Day Walking Challenge on page 39?

NO

**Now that you know how much walking you do, you can set yourself goals to try and increase your walking** and put your best foot forward to try build walking into your daily routine. Use the goal setting instructions to help you set attainable goals. Remember; every step you take is a step towards improved health and wellbeing.

## Taking the first step

**If you are starting physical activity it is important to start slowly and gradually build up the pace and intensity** over time. See these guidelines as a long-term target, and if you reach them, set yourself new targets.

**Other moderate intensity activities such as playing sports, swimming or cycling are also beneficial to your health.** These activities can be included in the optimum 150 minutes of physical activity per week. Check out [www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie) to learn more.

## 21 Day Walking Challenge

**Use the 21 Day Walking Challenge on page 39** to record the amount of walking you do every day. This will give you an idea of how much walking you do each week and help motivate you to do more.

# Walking the Walk

## Safety first

**The benefits of physical activity and walking far outweigh the possible risks.** While injuries participating in moderate intensity activities can occur, we each have a responsibility to ensure that risk is minimised by planning appropriately and responsibly.

## Possible risks can be reduced by:

- Increasing the level of physical activity or walking **very gradually over a period of time**
- Wearing **suitable clothing and footwear**
- **Using appropriate equipment and protective equipment** (such as high vis vests at night, on country roads and poorly lit areas)
- Being active **in safe places**



## Useful kit

**If you are walking on footpaths, roads or local parks a pair of comfortable shoes will be fine.** A light waterproof jacket will also help to keep you dry. Wear a high visibility vest or arm bands if you are walking in the early morning or in the dark evenings.

# Let's get going!

**You don't have to do it all at once.** You can build up the number of minutes you walk by achieving small bouts of activity (at least 10 minutes at a time is best). You can start at a slow pace and build up to a brisk pace as mentioned below.

## Warm up



The warm up does not have to be technical. Starting your walk at a slow pace will give your joints time to get greased up. A warm up also allows time for your heart rate to gradually increase pumping blood to the working muscles.



A warm up can be very short, even 5 minutes may be enough. But listen to your body, only increase the pace when you are ready to do so.



**Remember** to get the go-ahead from your doctor before you start any exercise programme.

**Listen to your body,** only increase the pace when you are ready to do so.

# Posture

## Standing tall

**Before your walk, as well as during your walk, take the time to do a posture check.** Having good posture increases the amount of energy you use as well as keeping your joints stable and limiting the chance of lower back pain.

## Posture check



Standing tall



Lift your shoulders towards your ears, then roll them back & down



Pull your navel towards your spine

**You can build up** the number of minutes you walk by achieving small bouts of activity.



**Varying where you walk can keep your motivation levels up.**

# Intensity

## Make it brisk!

**For health benefits it is optimal to walk at a moderate intensity.**

Walking at a moderate intensity will mean that your heart rate is higher than usual and your breathing rate is higher than usual. This should feel like a brisk pace. To ensure you are walking at a moderate intensity you can do a few simple checks.



**If you have not been active for a while start with short walks of 10 minutes or less.** Gradually increase the length of your walk over time.

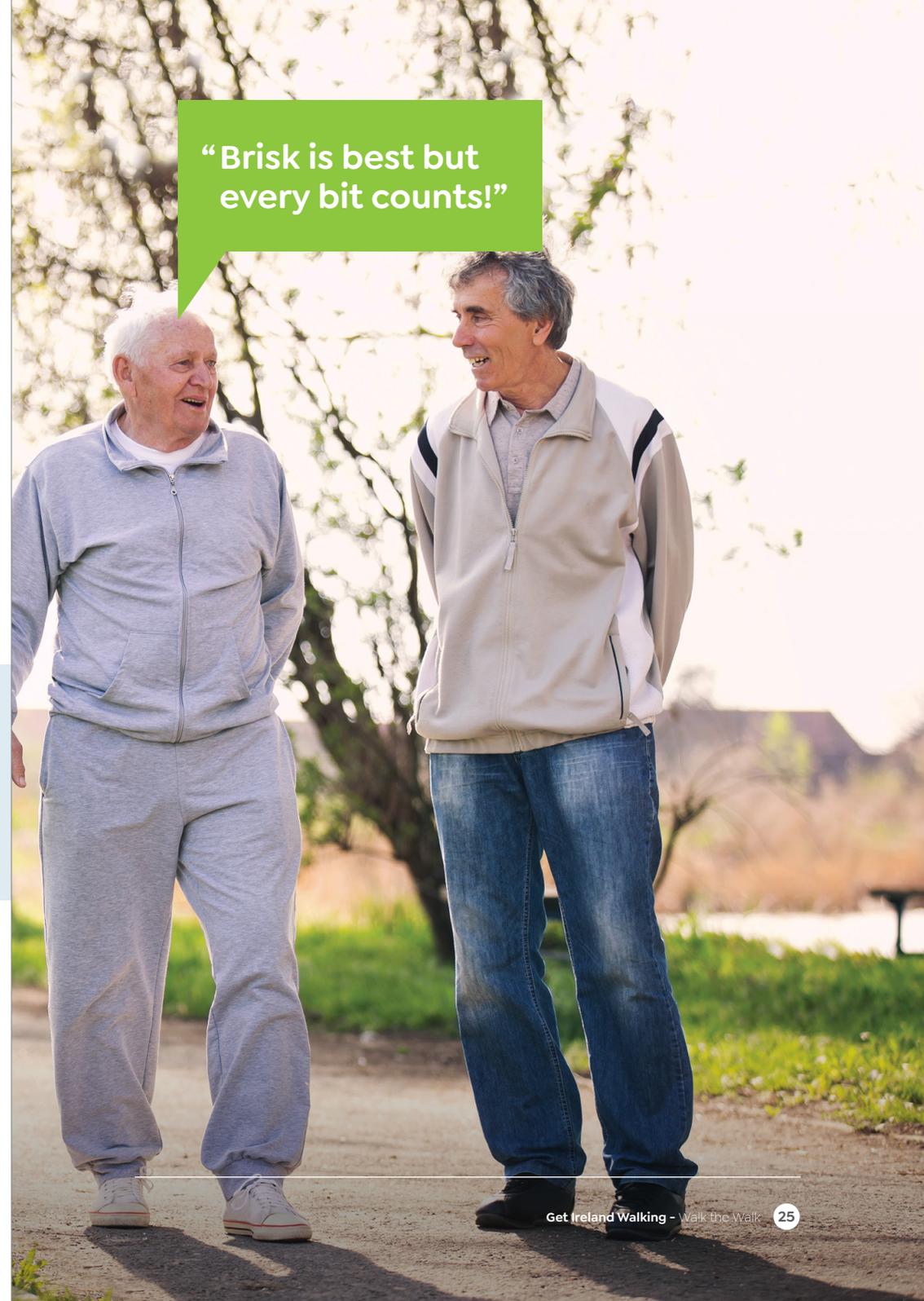


### Talk test:

**The talk test is an easy way to ensure you are working at the correct intensity.**

If you can have a conversation with someone next to you while still breathing faster than usual then you are walking at a moderate intensity.

Varying the location of your walks can keep your motivation levels up. You might like to find a loop around your town or community or go for your walk in a park or on a trail. There are many resources available to help you plan your walks whether you want to stay in your community or walk on trails. Check out [www.getirelandactive.ie](http://www.getirelandactive.ie) for more information about where you could walk.



“Brisk is best but every bit counts!”

# Why not walk more?

## The reasons reasoned with!

There are many things in life that can get in the way of walking for wellbeing. **Here are some common excuses that people talk about:**

### “I don’t have the time.”

**It only takes 30 minutes of your time to do a walk that will help to maintain your health.** Just go out the door and walk, there is no extra time needed to travel to a venue or to prepare. Try to fit walking into your daily routine or use it as an opportunity to meet a friend and catch up. Let family and friends know about your plans and ask them to support you so you can stick with your routine.

### “I don’t know any good places to walk”

**You don’t need anything special to go out for a walk.** You can walk in your community. However, it can be a more pleasurable experience when you walk in some pleasant surroundings.

Check out [getirelandactive.ie](http://getirelandactive.ie) to find accessible walking trails that include walking routes around communities and parklands.

### “I don’t have anyone to walk with”

Chat with family or friends about the benefits of walking and see if you can inspire them to join you. Alternatively, you can identify existing walking groups on [www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie). There are walking groups that meet on weekdays and weekends and groups that suit all abilities.

Top tip!

**Just go out the door and walk,** there is no extra time needed to travel to a venue or to prepare.

### “I am too unfit to walk”

**Walking is one of the easiest ways to get active.** You can set your own pace and your own walk duration. Over time you can gradually increase these.

### “After a busy day I am just too tired to walk”

**Try fitting in a walk when you feel most energetic, this could be early in the day.** Walking will give you more energy. Try it out and notice the difference in your energy levels throughout the day.

### “I am overweight and wouldn’t feel comfortable walking”

**Combining walking and healthy eating is a really good way to lose weight.** Walking is a very safe way to start to get active and people of all ages, shapes and fitness levels are embracing walking as a way to get active.

# Setting goals

## Set yourself a walking related Goal

Thinking about and setting goals can help with motivation to go walking more often. When we set goals for ourselves it is important to follow the SMART goal setting principles.

**SMART stands for:**

**S Specific:** Be as specific as you can in your goal.

**M Measurable:** It is important that your goal is measurable. For example, the number of minutes walked in a week is measurable, so this is a good goal.

**A Attainable:** Your goal needs to be attainable or achievable. Once you achieve your first goal, you can then build on that to create bigger goals in the future.

**R Realistic:** Be realistic about your goal. Aim for an attainable and realistic target.

**T Time based:** Your goal needs to have a specific time frame. For example, if you set yourself the goal of walking 60 minutes in one week, this is "time-based".

**Try to fit walking into your daily routine or use it as an opportunity to meet a friend and catch up.**

Let family and friends know about your plans and ask them to support you so you can stick with your routine.

# My goal:

What I will do to build more walking into my day  
(eg. get off the bus a stop earlier and walk the rest of the way)

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My goal is to walk for \_\_\_\_ minutes each week.

Think of something to reward yourself with, once you achieve your goal.

I will reward myself with: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: DD / MM / YYYY

After 2 weeks come back and tick the box below if you achieved your goal:

**Goal achieved!**

If you meet this goal well done, but if you don't achieve your goal, don't worry - rethink your goal and set a new goal below.

## Future goal:

What I will do to build more walking into my day

---

---

My goal is to walk for \_\_\_\_ minutes each week.

I will reward myself with: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: DD / MM / YYYY

**Goal achieved!**

Treat these goals as a promise to yourself

# Practical tips!

Below is a list of practical tips to help you increase your walking

- **Park a distance away from the shops or work** and walk the rest of the way, or better still, leave the car at home.
- **Get off the bus one or two stops before your destination** and walk the rest of the way.
- Go for a walk with family, friends, neighbours **or a walking group.**
- **Lead by example** – ask your children or grandchildren to come for a walk.
- You could join an existing walking group in your community (check out the listing of groups on [www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie)).

“ I leave reminders around the house to motivate me to get walking ”

-Mary

Top tip!

If you are not used to walking every day set goals to build walking into your everyday life. It is easier than you may think and it all adds up.

**Lead by example** – ask your children or grandchildren to come for a walk.



# Walking Groups

## Benefits of walking in a group include:

- Group members can **help keep each other motivated**.
- **Members encourage each other** when enthusiasm is low.
- Walking in a group is **sociable**.
- Walking groups can help give individuals **confidence to walk on their own too**.

If you are interested in starting your own walking group you can get in touch with the Get Ireland Walking team for support or register your walking group on [www.getirelandwalking.ie](http://www.getirelandwalking.ie) and you will receive walking group supports and free walk leader insurance.

## Once you have registered to obtain free Walk Leader insurance, starting your walking group is simple:

### Step 1:

Identify a day, time and location to meet and go for a walk eg. walk on Friday at 10am.

### Step 2:

Identify a suitable route around the town or locality. Start with a short walk and build from there.

### Step 3:

Why not finish your walk at a cafe, or bring a flask and enjoy a cup of tea and a chat!





# Walking Groups

When you register with us, you and all your group members are joining a growing national movement of people who are proud to walk – for fun, for health and for yourself.

**Registering with Get Ireland Walking is free and registered groups also get the following services:**

- **Insurance cover for the Volunteer Walk Leaders and Group Coordinators** – see our [Quick Guide to Insurance](#) for more details.
- **A listing for your group on our national database of walking groups** – Visit our [Join a Walking Group](#) page for more details.
- **Downloadable useful Walking Group documents**, including our new Walk Leader Toolkit, copies of forms that will make it easier to organise group walks, helpful quick guides:  
[View Resources](#)
- **An opportunity to share experiences and ideas to inspire others to get walking, and to start their own groups.** We always love to see and share your stories, photographs and videos – keep an eye on our Facebook page, Twitter or Instagram for these.

**Get Ireland Walking is here to support people and communities to get walking: We want to provide the opportunity for everybody to walk – to feel good, to get healthy, and to have fun.**

# Sample walking programmes

## Walking plan A:

The following walking plan helps you to build walking into your daily life. This walking plan would also suit a walker who is starting into physical activity after a period of relative inactivity.

	Weeks 1 + 2	Weeks 3 + 4	Weeks 5 + 6	Weeks 7 + 8	Weeks 9 + 10	Weeks 11 + 12
<b>Mon - Fri</b>	<p>Aim to walk a little more than usual as part of your usual daily routine.</p> <p>Try walk to the local shop instead of driving and take the stairs instead of a lift.</p>	<p><b>10-15 mins</b></p> <p>Aim to do at least one walk of 10 minutes, three days a week. Time yourself and try not to stop for 10 minutes.</p>	<p><b>2 x 10-15 mins</b></p> <p>Add another walk of 10-15 minutes, two or three days a week. Perhaps do one in the morning and one in the evening.</p>	<p><b>2 x 15 mins</b></p> <p>Try to walk for 15 minutes twice a day every day this week.</p> <p>You could do one on your lunch break and one in the evening.</p>	<p><b>2 x 15 mins</b></p> <p>You are still aiming for two 15 minute walks every day. Try walk briskly on at least one of them.</p>	<p><b>30 mins</b></p> <p>Aim for a 30 minute walk each day. Do your best to include brisk walking into this 30 minutes.</p>
<b>Sat / Sun</b>	<p>Go for a walk to visit a friend or use a nearby park for a walk.</p>	<p><b>20-25 mins</b></p> <p>Try a slightly longer walk in pleasant streets, a park or in nature.</p>	<p><b>25-30 mins</b></p> <p>Do at least one walk of 25 to 30 minutes in nice surroundings. Do your best to include brisk walking.</p>	<p><b>30 mins</b></p> <p>Try walk briskly for 30 minutes on your weekend walk.</p>	<p><b>30-45 mins</b></p> <p>Try a longer walk of up to 45 minutes, one day a week. Look for a pleasant area to do this walk, relax and enjoy.</p>	<p><b>45-60 mins</b></p> <p>Now you are a fit and healthy walker, enjoy your new found freedom by walking further from home.</p>

Top tip!

If this plan progresses too fast for you, don't worry. You can repeat a plan for the same week until you feel ready to progress.

# Sample walking programmes

## Walking plan B:

This walking plan is for those who are already walkers or who already achieve moderate amounts of physical activity. Walking plan B is designed to help you use walking as your primary form of exercise and to get fit. This plan is also suited to those who wish to lose weight and maintain weight loss.



	Weeks 1 + 2	Weeks 3 + 4	Weeks 5 + 6	Weeks 7 + 8	Weeks 9 + 10	Weeks 11 + 12
<b>Mon - Fri</b>	<b>30 mins</b> Walk for 30 minutes each day of the week.	<b>35 mins</b> Walk for 10 minutes at a moderate pace to warm up. Add 5 minutes of brisk walking, followed by 10 minutes of steady paced walking. Repeat this 5 minute brisk walking followed by 5 minutes moderate pace.	<b>40 mins</b> Walk for 10 minutes at a moderate pace to warm up. Add 10 minutes of a brisk pace, followed by 5 minutes of a steady pace. Repeat 10 minutes brisk pace and 5 minutes steady walking.	<b>37 mins</b> Walk for 10 minutes at a moderate pace to warm up. Add 10 minutes of a brisk pace, followed by 2 minutes of a steady pace. Repeat 10 minutes brisk pace and finish with 5 minutes walking steady.	<b>37 mins</b> Walk for 10 minutes at a moderate pace to warm up. Add 10 minutes of a brisk pace, followed by 2 minutes of a steady pace. Repeat 10 minutes brisk pace and finish with 5 minutes walking steady.	<b>47 mins</b> Walk for 10 minutes at a moderate pace to warm up. Add 15 minutes of a brisk pace, followed by 2 minutes of a steady pace. Repeat 15 minutes brisk pace and finish with 5 minutes walking steady.
<b>Sat / Sun</b>	<b>60 mins</b> Try a longer walk of up to 60 minutes on one day of the week. Try walk in pleasant surroundings so you can relax and enjoy the walk.	<b>60 mins</b> Try get in a 60 minute walk on one day of the week. Walk in a nice location and let it be your reward.	<b>60 mins</b> Ask a friend or family member to join you for a 60 minute walk. Walking and talking makes the time fly by.	<b>60 mins</b> Do your best to get into nature for your 60 minute walk, one day a week. Take time to observe the beauty and relax.	<b>60 mins</b> Try find new walking locations for your 60 minute walk. A change of scenery can be as good as a break.	Have you heard of <b>park run</b> ? Find a friend to join you at park run. Don't worry, you can walk at these events too!  Visit: <a href="http://www.parkrun.ie">www.parkrun.ie</a>



Sport Ireland Trails maintains a National Trails Register that has currently 1029 trails listed. There are a variety of different walking routes available on their website.

This website is great for finding out what is available in your locality and planning your next short or long group walk.

**The Sport Ireland National Trails Register website includes:**

- Forest Trails
- River Bank walks
- Coastal Paths
- National Waymarked Trails
- Accessible Routes

The Sport Ireland Outdoors website is great for **finding out what walking is available in your locality.**

There are fully developed waymarked walking routes available in every county in Ireland, so go walking and **#FindYourTrail.**





# 21 Day Walking Challenge Record

## How to use your 21 Day Walking Challenge Record

After your walk mark yourself out of 10 for:

**F** How you're Feeling    **M** Your Mood    **E** Your Energy Levels

▶ 1 = bad / low    ▶ 5 = fair / average    ▶ 10 = great / high



Every time you go for a walk remember to jot down the amount of time you walk for. Set yourself a target for each week and consider how you feel after your walks.

To find out more visit:  
[getirelandwalking.ie](http://getirelandwalking.ie)

Top tip!

Variety in your walk locations can keep motivation levels up. Try to find a new loop in your community or go for your walk in a park or on a trail.

## 21 Day Walking Challenge Record

Name: .....

Start Date: ○ ○ / ○ ○ / ○ ○ ○ ○

Week 1 Target	Week 2 Target	Week 3 Target
Mins. Day 1	Mins. Day 8	Mins. Day 15
F M E	F M E	F M E
Mins. Day 2	Mins. Day 9	Mins. Day 16
F M E	F M E	F M E
Mins. Day 3	Mins. Day 10	Mins. Day 17
F M E	F M E	F M E
Mins. Day 4	Mins. Day 11	Mins. Day 18
F M E	F M E	F M E
Mins. Day 5	Mins. Day 12	Mins. Day 19
F M E	F M E	F M E
Mins. Day 6	Mins. Day 13	Mins. Day 20
F M E	F M E	F M E
Mins. Day 7	Mins. Day 14	Mins. Day 21
F M E	F M E	F M E
Week 1 Total	Week 2 Total	Week 3 Total



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

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