



The simple answer to better health: Walking

Physical inactivity contributes to almost one-quarter of the burden of cardiovascular disease in Australia (24%).¹ In 2014-15, nearly one in three (29.7%) 18-64 year olds were insufficiently active (less than 150 minutes in the last week) while 14.8% were inactive (no exercise in the last week). Since 2001, the proportion and number of Australians doing very little or no exercise has continued to increase.²

Whilst physical inactivity is a major health issue, the opportunity to reverse the trend is at our feet. Walking is one of the most popular physical activities in Australia. Walking helps to reduce stress, be more alert, have a healthier body and build strong relationships. Walking is a physical activity suitable for people of all ages and fitness levels. It can be done just about anywhere and is free. Walking also has a very low risk of injury as it is low impact (not jarring on the joints) and doesn't require any special equipment or training. It also has the lowest drop-out rate of any type of exercise.

The National Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines recommend that an adult accumulate 150 to 300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity each week. The guidelines also recommend that the time spent in prolonged sitting be minimised, and that long periods of sitting be broken up as often as possible.³

A target like 10,000 steps is often a useful benchmark to quantify and track daily activity. Wearing activity monitors (like a pedometer) can help with motivation to reach targets, and provide reminders to move more throughout the day.

According to the American Heart Association, a recent study showed that the same energy used for moderate- intensity walking and vigorous-intensity running resulted in similar reductions in risk for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and possibly coronary heart disease over the study's six years.⁴ This amplifies the opportunity of walking, by suggesting that adoption of regular brisk walking can have as much of an impact as regular running in reducing chronic disease risk factors.

The Heart Foundation Walking Program is an easily accessible and community-based walking group initiative, as part of a broader Heart Foundation goal to encourage and support walking and physical activity to build the heart health of Australia. We work to create supportive environments for physical activity and raising the profile of walking as a fun, free and accessible physical activity. Heart Foundation Walking is Australia's largest free walking community.

Heart Foundation Walking offers many types of walking groups all over Australia and the opportunity to track steps using the Heart Foundation Walking App. Our program includes everyone regardless of age, fitness level, and location. Over the past 22 years more than 80,000 Australians have participated in Heart Foundation Walking.

To find out more please visit www.walking.heartfoundation.org.au or contact the Heart Foundation Helpline on 13 11 12.

¹ Heart Foundation (2015). Physical inactivity as deadly as smoking
<https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/news/physical-inactivity-as-deadly-as-smoking>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015). National Health Survey: First results, 2014-15.
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4364.0.55.001-2014-15-Main%20Features-Exercise-29>

³ Commonwealth Government (2014). Department of Health – Australia's physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines.
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines#apaadult>

⁴ Williams, P., Thompson, P. (2013). Walking Versus Running for Hypertension, Cholesterol, and Diabetes Mellitus Risk Reduction. *Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol.* 33:1085-1091.