

# Walking - A Lost Art

Kirsty Meynell

Today, epidemics of stress, depression and obesity are regular features in the news and never far from everyone's minds. Activity levels, however, are far lower than ever before and in our frenetic and busy lives, time is a very precious commodity.

So how can a person fit health and fitness into their life without having to create even more space in their packed schedule? As a man once said "your body is built for walking", so why not let it do what it's good at.

We all walk... whether it's to the train station in the morning, to take the dog out, to go shopping, even just to brush your teeth in the morning... the problem is that we don't do enough of it. Of the 10,000 average steps a person should be taking every day to remain fit and healthy a large number of us never get beyond 4,000. A telling statistic.

There are new forms of exercise and fitness fads but the one thing which we all do and that comes so naturally to us and is often overlooked and underrated is walking.

The benefits of walking have been understood within the health profession for quite some time. In 400BC Hippocrates is said to have described walking as "man's best medicine" and others have described it as "the closest thing to the perfect exercise". It is perhaps time, therefore, that we all started to take walking more seriously as a means of improving our health and fitness.

The surprising number of benefits attributed to walking are little known or understood by the average person in the street. Studies have shown lower rates of physical injury with similar benefits to higher impact sports such as running. Research has also shown signs that regular walking can reduce the risk of premature death, breast cancer, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, coronary heart disease and stroke.

Walking and spending time in natural daylight has also been shown to help combat Seasonal Affective Disorder and the Sleep Council recommends walking to combat insomnia - as long as your walk isn't within three hours of going to bed the exercise will help you to fall asleep more quickly.

An increasingly documented benefit of walking is also the treatment of anxiety and depression and its symptoms. A recent report by MIND, the leading mental health charity in the UK, promoting the application of "ecotherapy" as an official and recognised treatment for various forms of mental illness found that walking outdoors has a particularly significant impact on a patient's self esteem and confidence as well as significantly decreasing a patient's feelings of depression.

So where should a person start? Simplicity is key so get into the walking frame of mind, by using the stairs instead of the lifts, or by walking up escalators. Increase to getting off one train or bus stop early every day. It's amazing how the steps add up!

Setting goals is very important - whether it's a number of steps or a challenge event, aim high and increase the number of steps every day or every week as it feels comfortable. Pedometers are a great way to keep track of daily steps and to stay motivated. Slowly but surely the extra steps will become a normal part of every day life. Many people find it easier and more enjoyable walking with others and there are many walking groups around that enables group members to talk while they walk!

*Kirsty Meynell is a Director and Nordic Walking Instructor of Walk To Walk Ltd. Walk To Walk are a specialist activity and events business focussing on walking. For further information or for advice on how to get started on a walking fitness plan go to their website at [www.walktowalk.com](http://www.walktowalk.com) or call on 01959 565555*



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