

Establishing Worksite Walking Clubs

The following suggestions can help you offer safe physical activity to accommodate the needs of all your employees. By offering a worksite walking club, you will be encouraging vitality and productivity while supporting workers' interests in increased physical activity.



Are you looking for an easy way to get healthy during the workday? Interested in finding an activity that can be both social and beneficial to your health? Participating in a worksite walking club is a great way to accomplish these goals. This guide is designed to walk you through the steps you need to take to create a successful walking club at your worksite.

WHY WALK?

It's Healthy

Walking...

- Improves flexibility and coordination.
- Helps to control body weight and reduce body fat.
- Improves mood and relieves symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Reduces high cholesterol and lowers blood pressure.
- Strengthens bones.
- Reduces the risk of chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some types of cancer.

Overall, regular participation in physical activities, like walking, is associated with increased life expectancy!¹

It's Cost-Effective

- A healthier workforce results in lower rates of absenteeism, increased productivity, and lower health care costs for employers.

It's Social

- Coworkers interact with each other, building a stronger sense of teamwork and increased morale.

Walking is one of the best, most convenient forms of physical activity. It can be enjoyed by those young and old, fast or slow, beginner or experienced.

STEP 1: ORGANIZING YOUR WALKING CLUB

Before starting a walking club, it is important to identify 3 to 5 people to help you start your club. These employees will help you promote the walking club and encourage employee participation. These individuals might already exist in the form of a worksite wellness committee or advisory group.

As an alternative, consider asking people who are already walking for fitness to be “charter members.” Suggest that each charter member ask 2 or 3 coworkers to join. Remember to invite supervisors and/or human resources (HR) staff as well.

STEP 2: PLANNING THE DETAILS OF YOUR WALKING CLUB

When planning a worksite walking club, be sure to consider the following:

When and How Often Will the Club Meet?

- Set a specific, standard time when most employees are able to attend (e.g., a time when no regularly scheduled meetings occur like during morning, lunch, or afternoon break periods).
- Piggyback on existing events that can complement the walk, such as walking to a nearby farmers' market.
- Ideally, participants should walk 2 to 3 days a week (e.g., Monday/Wednesday/Friday or Tuesday/Thursday). Daily would be even better!

Select a Walking Route

- Consider establishing your first walking club route around a safe park nearby or along well-kept sidewalks around your workplace. If desired, purchase inexpensive pedometers to track your steps.

¹ Davison & Grant 1993, US Dept of Health 1996, British Heart Foundation 2000. For more info, see www.ramblers.org.uk/INFO/everyone/health.html#Benefits

- Choose a route that always starts and finishes in the same place— ideally the lobby or sidewalk in front of your worksite. This will allow people of different fitness levels to walk various distances and find their way back.
- Utilize online mapping Web sites to identify and/or measure the distance of a route chosen by you and/or the walking club.
- Contact your county parks and recreation department for information on walking trails and routes in your area.
- If safety is a concern, consult local law enforcement for guidance on safe routes and to make them aware of your walking club activities.

STEP 3: PROMOTING YOUR WALKING CLUB

Once the logistics are determined, begin recruitment efforts. Select a kick off date and start promoting the walking club to your fellow employees. Invite someone from HR to assist in these efforts.

How to Create Excitement for Your Walking Club:

- Develop promotional materials such as posters and flyers. Choose a theme and display it on all printed materials. Sample themes include: *Step Up to Better Health*, *Energize Your Workday – Join the Walking Club*, *Small Steps to Success*, *Wake Up Your Body – Walk for Health*, *Walk for Life*, *Walk Across America or Walk (Your City’s Name)*. Put up posters and flyers in onsite cafeterias, break rooms, hallways, bulletin boards, in addition to each employee’s cubicle, mailbox, locker, etc.
- Advertise in your worksite’s newsletter.
- Work with your HR/payroll department to get a free announcement sent out with monthly or bi-monthly pay checks.
- Make announcements through email distribution lists or by sending a voicemail out to all employees.

When Designing a Flyer, Include the Following Information:

- Date, time, and location of the walking club kick off event.
- Make sure flyers indicate that people will be WALKING on the kick off date.

- List a contact person and his/her phone number and email address.
- Mention the benefits of walking.
- Tell people to bring a friend!

STEP 4: STAGING A KICK OFF EVENT

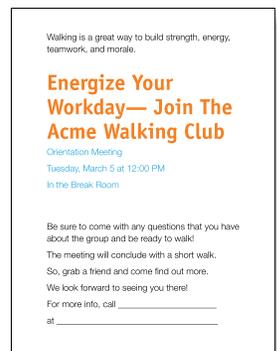
At the kick off event, provide a brief introduction about the particulars of the walking club:

- Circulate a sign-in sheet to get contact information for all interested participants (e.g., name, telephone number, email).
- Discuss and agree on the logistical arrangements of the group (e.g., when/where the walks will occur and how long each walk will last).
- Encourage all interested participants to walk as often as possible, with the understanding that if they miss a walk, they can rejoin the group at any time.
- Briefly mention that because everybody begins at different fitness levels, people should walk at their own pace. Also, walkers should consult with their doctors if they have any chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, etc.

Safety First!

- If you’re going for a longer walk, **warm-up** with stretching exercises and include a **cool-down** period to reduce stress on your heart and muscles.
- **Practice correct posture**—head upright, and arms bent at the elbow and swinging as you stride.
- Choose **comfortable, supportive shoes**, such as running, walking, or cross training shoes, or light hiking boots.
- **Protect your skin** by wearing a wide-brimmed hat, longer clothing, UV-protective sunglasses, and sunscreen. Visit www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/CPNS/skin/ for more sunscreen information.
- **Drink plenty of water** before, during, and after walking to cool working muscles and keep your body hydrated. Begin slowly, and gradually increase the length of time and the intensity of your walk.

SAMPLE FLYER



- **Use sidewalks** where provided, and cross or enter streets where it is legal to do so. When a sidewalk is not provided, it is usually safer to **walk facing road traffic**.
- Make it easy for drivers to see you. Dress in **light colors** and **wear reflective material**. Carry a flashlight at dusk or when it's dark.

Now, it is time to hit the pavement and begin your walking club's first walk!

STEP 5: KEEPING YOUR WALKING CLUB GOING AND GROWING

Maintaining and Expanding Your Walking Club's Membership

Walking clubs are very dynamic – a group can start with 40 walkers and dwindle at any given time to 10 consistent walkers. Fluctuations occur, but it is the group's responsibility to continuously and creatively promote the walking club. Also, keep in mind that walking clubs may not be feasible or successful at all worksites. At worksites where this is the case, the activity of walking can still be promoted to employees. The resulting increase in employees' physical activity levels will benefit the individual employees and the worksite as a whole, just as a formal walking club would.

Maintaining Motivation

Recognition at the worksite is important for motivation. Ways to motivate walking club members and give recognition to the members' efforts include:

- Highlighting the walking club in your worksite newsletter, including testimonials from walkers and a calendar of the club's scheduled walking activities.
- Scheduling quarterly social functions, such as barbecues, picnics, or healthy break time snacks, after scheduled walks.
- Rotating the leadership of the walking club at least annually.
- Recognizing members when they reach special milestones – 10 miles, 50 miles, 100 miles, etc. or 1 hour, 5 hours, 10 hours, etc. Members can keep track of their miles or hours walked by using a walking journal or log. Check out www.walking.about.com/cs/measure/a/blhowtrack.htm for free printable walking logs.

- Organizing challenges such as increased distances or time spent walking.
- Providing participants with incentive items such as t-shirts, motivational posters and brochures related to walking (see www.journeyworks.com), water bottles, visors, lip balm, sunscreen, or pedometers. Pedometers can be purchased in many sporting goods stores or directly from manufacturers. They can be digital or analog. For direct sales or bulk pricing, visit:

- New Lifestyles at www.digiwalker.com
- Optimal Health Products at www.optimalhealthproducts.com
- Accusplit at www.accusplit.com
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield at www.bcbs.com/walkingworks/crossshield.html

STEP 6: EVALUATING THE SUCCESS OF YOUR WALKING CLUB

Management support is essential to maintaining a successful worksite walking club. In order to sustain management support, it is a good idea to periodically share evaluation data, confirming the benefits of the club and the positive effects it has on its members. Consider implementing some of the following simple evaluation ideas to measure the effectiveness of your worksite walking club:

- Keep records of attendance at each walking club event. Attendance counts will help you to see if there has been an overall increase or decrease in walkers.
- Consider having the walking club members fill out periodic satisfaction surveys. These surveys can give the members a chance to report positive feedback about the walking club, as well as feedback on what can be done to improve the club.
- Have a few walking club members write up brief testimonials that describe their experiences with the club and the benefits that participation has brought to them. These testimonials can be shared with upper management or all staff through an e-mail distribution list or in the worksite newsletter.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS	
Coordinating your walking club's efforts with national events can help increase awareness and motivation. Check the following Web sites for events in your area, or start your own event!	
FEBRUARY	JUNE
Heart Month American Heart Association www.americanheart.org	National Trails Day www.americanhiking.org/events/ntd
APRIL	National Men's Health Week www.menshealthweek.org
California Public Health Week www.dhs.ca.gov/phweek	JULY
MAY	National Recreation and Parks Month www.nrpa.org
National Bike Month www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikemonth/	SEPTEMBER
National Physical Fitness and Sports Month www.fitness.gov/may_month_observances.html	National Women's Health and Fitness Day www.fitnessday.com/women/index.htm
National Walk to Lunch Day www.americawalks.org/walktolunch/index.htm	OCTOBER
World Walking Day www.ivv.org/englishweltwandertag.htm	Healthy Lung Month www.lungusa.org/healthylungmonth/index.html
National Running and Fitness Week www.americanrunning.org	NOVEMBER
National Senior Health and Fitness Day www.fitnessday.com/senior/index.htm	American Diabetes Month www.diabetes.org
National Employee Health and Fitness Day www.physicalfitness.org/nehf.html	World Run Day www.runday.com
	International Walk to School Week www.iwalktoschool.org
	Walk to School Day www.walktoschool-usa.org



RESOURCES

Here are resources and links that will help in starting a walking group:

- The Complete Guide to Walking for Health, Weight Loss, and Fitness by Mark Fenton — includes information about walking warm-up moves, apparel, clubs and walking organizations, events, athletic footwear, hiking organizations, mall walking, walking poles, and socks.
- The *Fruit, Vegetable, and Physical Activity Toolbox for Community Educators* — includes nutrition and physical activity information and lessons, such as *Walking on the Path to Better Health*: www.networkforahealthycalifornia.net/latino/resources.

- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center — serves as a clearinghouse for information about health and safety, advocacy, education, access, and mobility for anyone interested in pedestrian and bicycle issues: www.pedbikeinfo.org and www.walkinginfo.org.
- Federal Highway Administration Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Research Program — promotes bicycle and pedestrian transportation accessibility, use, and safety: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm.

ATTRIBUTE

How to Start a Walking Program: A Guide for Local Program Coordinators. California Center for Physical Activity, California Department of Public Health, www.caphysicalactivity.org/walkkit.

