

## Getting to Know Your Feet Walking for Health

Walking is a great way to integrate physical activity into your life. Walking is one of the most popular forms of physical activity. Walking is a weight-bearing activity and helps increase bone strength and health. Once you have the green light from your health care provider you can begin using walking as a form of physical activity. Walking is free and can be done by most people. So, take a walk, get some fresh air, and enjoy the great outdoors.

Make sure you have medical clearance from your health care provider before beginning any physical activity program.

Before beginning walking you should do some basic stretches to make sure your muscles are ready. This helps keep you injury free. Some common stretches include:

- **Head circles.** Rotate your head in slow circles. Repeat this 5 to 10 times.
- **Arm circles.** Raise your arms out from your sides. With palms facing up, make 20 slow forward circles with your arms. Repeat these circles moving the arms backwards.
- **Ankle circles.** You want to do these either from a sitting or lying position. Lift your right leg and make slow circles forward, about 10 times with your right ankle, repeat with your left ankle.
- **Hip stretch.** From a standing position take a step back with your right leg; bend your knee, shifting weight back to your left leg. Keep your right leg straight and hold this for about 20 seconds. Repeat on the left leg.
- **Side reaches.** From a standing position, with your right arm, reach up as high as you can to your left side, rest your left arm on your hip for balance, and hold for 20 seconds. Repeat with the left arm.
- **Leg curl.** From a standing position, holding your left arm straight out from your body, reach back and grab hold of your right foot. Make sure you are well balanced and do not fall. Hold this for 20 seconds and repeat with the left leg.
- **Wall push.** Lean into the wall, with your feet about 3 to 4 feet from the wall. With your right knee slightly bent, lean into the wall, pushing up against it. Hold this position for about 20 seconds. Repeat with the left side.
- **Triceps stretch.** Raise your arms above your head. Bend your right arm and push the elbow back and down with your left arm. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat with the left arm.
- **Hips, hamstrings, and lower back stretches.** Bend your right leg forward until your knee is over the ankle. Resting your left knee on the ground, lower your hips, stretching slightly backward. Hold for 20 seconds. Repeat with the left leg.

Another important aspect of healthy walking is choosing the right shoe. Shoes should be of good quality and well fitting. Ask your shoe store personnel to help you choose the right shoe, being sure to measure your feet. Shoes should be wide enough and support the ball of your foot (or arch of your foot), and well cushioned to prevent rubbing that can cause blisters.

Adapted for use in Kentucky from American Podiatry Medical Association (2008). Walking. Available online at [http://www.apma.org/s\\_apma/doc.asp?CID=371&DID=9428](http://www.apma.org/s_apma/doc.asp?CID=371&DID=9428).

This is a publication in a eight-part series on **Getting to Know Your Feet**. Other publications in this series are:

- Overview: HSW-PAR.820
- Common Foot Ailments: HSW-PAR.821
- Aging Feet: HSW-PAR.822
- Arthritis: HSW-PAR.823
- Diabetes: HSW-PAR.824
- Injuries: HSW-PAR.825
- Information for Women: HSW-PAR.826

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