National Walking Day

HOW-TO GUIDE
National Walking Day is April 2. By committing to walk at least 30 minutes, you can get healthier and raise awareness about the importance of physical activity. On this day, millions of people throughout the United States will come together to take steps to live a healthier life for themselves, their families and their communities.

You can celebrate the day in your workplace, school or community. This guide includes heart-healthy tips, helpful articles and an intermediate walking plan to help you promote and celebrate National Walking Day.

What You Will Find in this Guide:

Your free toolkit includes everything you need to participate. You’ll find resources such as:

- Getting Started ........................................ 2
- Ideas for Participation ............................... 3
- Ideas for Promotion ................................. 4
- Four Weeks of Healthy Living Tips .......... 6
- Four Healthy Living Articles ....................... 8
- Four-Week Intermediate Walking Plan .... 13
- Four-Week Walking Countdown
  Challenge Tracker .................................. 14

Additional resources for National Walking Day:
- Posters and Graphics
- Warm-Weather Fitness Guide
- Cold-Weather Fitness Guide
National Walking Day is a day to get active and kick off healthy lifestyles in your community, in your circle of friends or with your family. It’s easy to get started with this guide, plus our great promotional resources and health information. Start here with our step-by-step action plan.

**Step 1: Choose your date**

National Walking Day is April 2, but you can set a different date if it works better for you.

**Step 2: Spread the word**

Use email and social media to help build awareness. Invite family and friends to participate with you. Send or post our health tips, articles and walking plan to get everyone moving.

**Step 3: Celebrate!**

Take a breath, and start walking. Today is the day you’ll pledge to live a longer, stronger and healthier life.
National Walking Day is a day to kick off a commitment to healthy living. Below is a list of ideas that you can use leading up to National Walking Day and after the day is over.

Before the Day
Building excitement is important. There are many ways to do this including:

- Send emails and/or use social media to increase awareness and promote your participation.
- Set a goal or make a pledge to commit to a healthier lifestyle. Tape your goal to a wall as a daily reminder of your healthy living commitment.
- Challenge your family and friends to join you and set their own goals.

On National Walking Day

- Wear sneakers. Wearing comfortable shoes will encourage you to walk more.
- Take a walk. Invite others to join you.

After the Event

Healthy living doesn’t stop after one day. Use National Walking Day as a starting point and keep the momentum going by launching a four-week program for health. Make it more fun by asking family and friends to join you.

Four-Week Walking Countdown Challenge
For the next four weeks commit to keep walking and living a healthy lifestyle. This toolkit includes four weeks of tips, articles, a walking plan and a walking tracker.

- Daily Tips — Read and post to social media daily or weekly.
- Articles — Read and post to kick off each week.
- Intermediate Walking Plan — Use daily to work up to 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day.
- Walking Countdown Challenge Tracker — Use daily to track your progress.

Ways To Make It More Fun

- Make the Four-Week Walking Countdown Challenge a competition and kick it off on National Walking Day.
- Form a walking club at MyWalkingClub.org.
- Have a party or a picnic to celebrate after four weeks of health.
- Participate in the Heart Walk. Have fun and raise funds to save lives from America’s No. 1 and No. 4 killers — heart disease and stroke. Find details for your local event at HeartWalk.org.

National Walking Day is where millions of Americans across the nation will take steps to a healthier life, but it’s also about having fun and creating camaraderie. Don’t forget to enjoy the day!
National Walking Day Announcement

Step by step, day after day, you walk to make progress. Every day we take thousands of steps to get where we need to go. Now we can take steps toward a healthier lifestyle and support the American Heart Association.

On Wednesday, April 2, I will join the American Heart Association in celebrating National Walking Day. It’s a day to challenge ourselves and our nation to get heart healthy and fit. Will you join me?
Find out more at Heart.org/NationalWalkingDay.

Walking Countdown Challenge Announcement

Thanks to everyone who joined me to celebrate National Walking Day.

We can’t get healthy in one day. So I’m launching a Four-Week Walking Countdown Challenge, courtesy of the American Heart Association. Will you join me? I’ll share:

• Daily healthy living tips;
• Great weekly articles that will keep us motivated through the ups and downs of getting healthy; and
• A walking plan for intermediate walkers to help us work up to 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.

Don’t forget that part of fighting heart disease, the nation’s No. 1 killer, is helping the American Heart Association fund lifesaving research. We can do that by spreading the word and raising funds from our friends and family for the [INSERT CITY NAME] Heart Walk on [INSERT DATE].

Thanks and let’s get walking!

Email/Social Media Tips

• Use the countdown theme by spelling out how many days are left, e.g., 30 days.
• Use the countdown in reverse by announcing which day of the countdown you’re on, e.g., Day One, Day Two.
• Ask for feedback on the tips you’re sending. For example, if you provide a tip on healthy substitutions, ask others to share their tips.
• Don’t overwhelm people with too many messages. If you don’t want to send daily emails, use social media or send one email a week with five daily tips, walking plan for the week and the article.
• Use the hashtag #WalkingDay to join the national conversation!
• Four Weeks of Healthy Living Tips .................................................. 6
• Weekly Articles
  ○ Week One: Ready, set, walk! ....................................................... 8
  ○ Week Two: Learn How to Work Out at Work .............................. 9
  ○ Week Three: Stressed out? Take control! ................................. 10
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• Four-Week Intermediate Walking Plan ................................. 13
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Try one tip a day for four weeks to improve your heart health.

**Week One**

- **Park and walk.** How many times have you circled the parking lot to find “the” spot? Spare yourself the stress and gain more energy by parking far away (or even in a remote lot) and walking farther to your destination.

- **Skip the cake**, say goodbye to pie and take a walk after dinner. You’ll get a reward that’s sweeter than dessert: more family time.

- **Warm up before you work out.** If you plan to run, start by walking. Then walk fast, and then speed up to a jog to increase your heart rate. When you aren’t active your muscles are cooler and tighter. Go easy on them by letting them get gradually loose and warmer instead of making them go straight from cold to hot.

- **Stretch after every workout to help prevent injury or strain.** Pick two or three of your favorite songs to play while you stretch — and don’t stop until they’re over. The minutes will speed by and you’ll get all the stretching you need.

- **Water is your friend! The harder and longer you work out, the more you need.** Did you know that 70 percent of your body is made of water? Make sure to replace whatever water you sweat out after each workout. Your body needs it.

**Week Two**

- **Don’t get stuck in a workout rut.** Try and incorporate a new physical activity every few weeks to stay motivated and make sure your workout is working. Try different activities and sports to keep your body guessing and to improve your fitness.

- **Take the stairs.** The elevator may go up — but it doesn’t make your heart rate climb. Take the stairs instead. You may huff and puff at first, but over time, your body will thank you.

- **Dance!** Do it in a ballroom, at a club or even in your living room. You’ll burn calories and gain a new hobby.

- **Shake up the after-school routine.** Limit screen time, including TV and video games, to less than 2 hours a day. Encourage your kids to go for a bike ride or shoot some hoops before starting on their homework. They’ll feel better and think better!

- **Give up bad habits.** Too much alcohol, cigarettes or caffeine can increase stress. If you smoke, decide to quit now.
Week Three

☐ Slow down and stress less. Try to pace instead of race. Plan ahead and allow enough time to get the most important things done.

☐ Get enough sleep and cut the stress. Try to get six to eight hours of sleep each night. If you can’t sleep, take steps to help reduce stress and depression. Physical activity may also help you sleep better.

☐ Get organized to lessen your stress. Use to-do lists to help you focus on your most important tasks. Approach big tasks one step at a time. For example, start by organizing just one part of your life — your car, desk, kitchen, closet, cupboard or drawer.

☐ Tune into fitness during TV time. Reject your inner couch potato. Walk, jog in place or use the treadmill at the gym while you watch your favorite 30-minute show.

☐ Wear a pedometer. To increase your physical activity, wear a pedometer for a week or two to find out how many steps you take on average each day. Then every two weeks increase your daily average by 500 steps. Before you know it, you’ll hit 10,000 steps a day!

Week Four

☐ Master the art of typing while on a treadmill by securing the laptop to the base. Be creative to fit in fitness while you work!

☐ Create a physical activity accountability partner. The co-worker who always holds you to your deadlines can serve double duty by helping you reach your fitness goals.

☐ Get busy when you travel for business. See the sights in new cities by walking, jogging or bicycling. If you will be spending a lot of time in an airport, walk while you wait! Many airports now have designated walking paths that travelers can use while they are waiting for their flights.

☐ Join a fitness center near your job. Work out before or after work to avoid rush-hour traffic, or drop by for a lunchtime workout.

☐ Get active at work. Many adults spend the majority of their day at work. Add some physical activity to your work day by taking 5 minute stretch breaks throughout the day, scheduling walking meetings when possible, or standing during conference calls.
Week One:  
Ready, set, walk!

Even if you’re a certified couch potato, getting active doesn’t have to be hard. It can also help you outwit heart disease, the No. 1 killer of all Americans. Cycling, jogging, swimming, skiing, aerobic dancing and dozens of other activities can help your heart. But walking is an easy way to get started! The American Heart Association recommends a total of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week.

That’s not as hard as it may sound. Start slowly. Gradually build up, with the goal of being active on most or all days of the week.

Step your way to success

If you’ve been sedentary for a long time, are overweight, have a high risk of heart disease or another chronic health problem, talk to your doctor before you start a walking program. To get started:

- **Try to walk at the same time of day** so it becomes part of your lifestyle. You might walk every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from noon to 12:30 p.m.
- **Find a convenient time and place.** Try to make walking a habit, but be flexible. If you miss an opportunity for physical activity, don’t give up. Work activity into your day another way.
- **Find a companion.** You’re more likely to stick with it if you have a buddy.
- **Wear comfortable, properly fitting sneakers or flat shoes with laces and comfortable, loose-fitting clothing.**
- **Look for chances to be more active during the day.** Walk the mall before shopping, take the stairs instead of the escalator or take 10–15 minute breaks while watching TV or sitting for walking or some other activity.
- **Keep yourself accountable** but cut yourself some slack if you stop for a while. Get started again gradually and work up to your old pace.
- **Already a walker and you want to pick up the pace?** Tack another mile onto your regular route, try a more challenging path or add an extra day of the week.
- **Track and celebrate your successes.** Visit StartWalkingNow.org to find American Heart Association-designated walking paths, personalized walking plans, an online community of walkers and more. Record the distance or length of time of your activity and how you feel after each session. Reward yourself at special milestones. Nothing motivates like success!
If you’re like most American adults, you spend most of your waking hours at work, and it could be taking a toll on your health. Sixty-eight percent of adults are obese or overweight, and many of us struggle to find time to work out and make healthy eating a priority. Get the most out of your workday with these tips to pick up the pace. Your heart will thank you!

There’s no law that says you have to sit when you meet. Try brainstorming on the go. Make your next catch-up with your boss a walking meeting and discuss project ideas with a co-worker while you make a few laps around the building.

Here are some other ways to stay active during the workday:

• **Walk during business calls.** March in place or at least stand when you talk on the phone.

• **Skip the email or the call and walk down the hall to talk to a co-worker.**

• **Tone your muscles while you work.** You might be surprised by how much you can improve your strength and balance with just a few minutes and a desk chair. Light hand weights are helpful and can be easily stored under your desk, but you can do these without weights too. It is generally recommended that you start with a set of 10–15 repetitions. The goal is to complete three sets of each activity.

• **Take the stairs instead of the elevator.** Or get off a few floors early and take the stairs the rest of the way.

• **Participate in or start a recreation league at your company.**

• **Form a sports team to raise money for charity events.**

• **Schedule physical activity time on your business calendar — and treat it like an important appointment.**

• **Get off the bus a few blocks early and walk the rest of the way to work or home.**

• **Walk around your building for a break during the work day or during lunch.**

• **Traveling for business?** Pack a jump rope or resistance band in your suitcase. Walk while you wait for your plane. Once you arrive at your destination, jump rope and do calisthenics in your hotel room. Take advantage of the fitness center or the swimming pool.

Is your workplace interested in getting employees more active? The average healthcare cost exceeds $3,000 per person annually, and an obese employee costs his or her employer an additional $460 to $2,500 in medical costs and sick days per year. A worksite physical activity program and a culture of activity can increase productivity, reduce absenteeism, lower turnover and reduce healthcare costs. Find out more information about the American Heart Association’s [Fit-Friendly Worksites Program](#).
When stress hits, your body releases adrenaline, a hormone that causes your breathing and heart rate to speed up and your blood pressure to rise. These reactions prepare you to deal with the situation — the “fight or flight” response.

Too much stress can contribute to everything from high blood pressure to asthma to ulcers to irritable bowel syndrome. More research is needed to determine how stress contributes to heart disease — the No. 1 killer of Americans. But stress may affect behaviors and factors that are proven to increase heart disease risk: high blood pressure and cholesterol levels, smoking, physical inactivity and overeating. There may also be a link to stroke, possibly because people with high anxiety levels are more likely to smoke and be physically inactive, which are risk factors for stroke.

Stress can also hurt your head, strain your back and make your stomach hurt. It can even zap your energy, wreak havoc on your sleep and make you feel cranky, forgetful and out of control.

When stress is constant, your body remains in high gear off and on for days or weeks at a time. Although the link between stress and heart disease isn’t clear, chronic stress may cause some people to drink too much alcohol, which can increase your blood pressure and may damage the artery walls.

Can managing stress reduce or prevent heart disease?

Managing stress is a good idea for your overall health, but current research doesn’t prove it’s effective for preventing heart disease. A few studies have examined how well treatment or therapies work in reducing the effects of stress on cardiovascular disease. Studies using psychosocial therapies — involving both psychological and social aspects — are promising in the prevention of second heart attacks.

What can you do about stress?

Figuring out how stress pushes your buttons is an important step in dealing with it. To help you feel better in the most stressful moments, try these healthy techniques and repeat the ones that work best for you.

• Practice positive self-talk — Turn negative thoughts into positive ones.
• Find an emergency stress stopper that works for you — Count to 10, take a walk, or take time to think about how a big problem can be broken into smaller pieces.
• Find pleasure — Read a book, play your favorite sport, or call a friend for coffee.
• Schedule daily relaxation time — Try to devote 10 minutes a day to breathing deeply or picturing peaceful scenes.
If your stress is nonstop, stress management classes can also help. Look for them at community colleges, rehab programs, in hospitals or by calling a therapist in your community. See if your workplace offers an employee assistance program. You may be referred to a counselor who can help. You may even want to give yoga a try. The calming benefits may lower your blood pressure and help you feel more relaxed.

Be careful not to confuse stress with anxiety. If you suffer from severe anxiety, talk to your doctor about whether you need medication. Stressful situations can worsen anxiety and depression. Be sure and talk to your doctor if you experience more than situational stress.

**How Can I Make My Life Healthier?**

Taking steps to lead a healthier lifestyle can help reduce your stress and your risk of health complications. Here are some heart-healthy suggestions:

- Don’t smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products.
- Have your blood pressure checked regularly. Keep your blood pressure below 120/80 mm Hg.
- Eat a healthy diet consistent with recommendations from the American Heart Association.
- Get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (or a combination) each week.
- Maintain a healthy weight (body mass index less than 25 kg/m2).
- Keep your total cholesterol at less than 200 mg/dL.
- Keep your fasting blood glucose at less than 100 mg/dL.
Getting your kids to trade screen time for physical activity may be the most challenging — and the most important — item on your to-do list. Walking is a great start, but there are other ways to get your whole family moving together.

Be a good role model. You don’t have to be perfect all the time, but if your kids see you getting physically active and trying to eat right, they’ll notice your efforts.

Get the whole family moving. Don’t just send your kids out to play. Plan times for everyone to get moving together. Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming, garden or just play hide-and-seek. Everyone will benefit from the exercise and the time together.

Break it up. The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes a week of exercise, but if that sounds overwhelming, try three 10-minute workout sessions a day.

Don’t make exercise a punishment. Forcing your child to go out and play may increase resentment and resistance. Try using physical activity to counter something your child doesn’t want to do. For example, let your kids ride bikes for 30 minutes before starting homework after school. Your child will beg for 20 more minutes outside just to put off the homework!

Build confidence and find an activity they love. Some kids are embarrassed to participate in sports because they don’t think they’re good enough. Find time to practice together and boost their confidence. Try swimming, dancing, cycling, skateboarding, yoga, walking or jumping rope. Encourage your child to explore multiple activities to find one they really enjoy.

Get your kids active while doing housework. Put a sticky note on all the items that need cleaning or tidying (like the kitchen table, the sofa, the bed). Ask your child to collect each sticky note after they clean the item. Make it a friendly competition to see who collects the most stickies. You could even offer a prize (like a Frisbee or jump rope from the dollar store) for the winner. Your kids will be physically active, helping with household chores and having fun!

Be realistic. Setting realistic goals and limits are key to adopting any new behavior. Small steps and gradual changes can make a big difference in your health over time, so start small and build up.

The more active your family gets, the more inspired you may feel to tackle other areas. Need tips for dealing with a picky eater? We’ve got ‘em. Want to learn how to make fast food healthier when you’re on the go? We can help. On a budget and need quick ideas for healthy foods that are under $1? Check out this list.

And remember: Something is always better than nothing! Physical activity is anything that makes you move your body and burns calories, even raking leaves, walking the dog or climbing stairs.
This four-week program is for the intermediate walker who wants to improve overall health and increase energy. Walks start at 20-30 minutes and gradually increase in both speed and duration. Health experts have found that approximately 30 minutes a day of regular moderate exercise is effective for improving health and reducing the risk of many diseases.

Monday, Wednesday and Thursday are the core workout days, with Tuesdays and weekends optional at the beginning. Fridays are “Alternate Activity” days. Always start your walk with 3-5 minutes at an easy, warm-up pace.

### Congratulations!
Now that you have completed the American Heart Association’s four-week walking program, continue to make walking a regular part of your life. For ongoing health and energy, try to walk at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week. As you’ve learned in this program, vary your speed, course and time to challenge yourself and to keep your program interesting. You’re on your way to a healthier lifestyle!

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### Four-Week Intermediate Walking Plan

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Monday</th>
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<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Weekend Workout (optional)</th>
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| 1    | Easy walk: 10-15 min  
Brisk walk: 10-15 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Easy walk: 25-30 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Easy walk: 10-15 min  
Brisk walk: 10-15 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Easy walk: 25-30 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Alternate Activity of your choice:  
Go dancing, rake leaves, etc. for 20+ min | Easy walk: 25-30 min |
| 2    | Total Time: 24-34 min  
Easy walk: 15-20 min  
Power Intervals  
Power walk: 30 sec  
Easy walk: 1 min  
Repeat 4-6 times  
Easy walk 3-5 min | Easy walk: 5 min  
Brisk walk: 20-25 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Easy walk: 30-35 min  
Brisk walk: 20-25 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Easy walk: 5 min  
Brisk walk: 20-25 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Alternate activity of your choice for 20-30 min | Easy walk: 5-10 min  
Brisk walk: 20-25 min |
| 3    | Total Time: 26-36 min  
Easy walk: 15-20 min  
Power Intervals  
Power walk: 30 sec  
Easy walk: 1 min  
Repeat 5-7 times  
Easy walk 3-5 min | Brisk walk: 30-35 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Total time: 25-30 min  
Easy walk: 10-15 min  
Brisk walk: 10 min or include a hill, incline, or stairs in your route  
Easy walk: 5 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Brisk walk for 30-35 min  
Stretch: 2 min | Alternate activity of your choice for 30+ min | Easy walk: 5 min  
Brisk walk: 20-30 min |
| 4    | Total Time: 27-37 min  
Easy walk: 10 min  
Brisk walk: 5-10 min  
Power Intervals  
Power walk: 30 sec  
Easy walk: 1 min  
Repeat 6-8 times  
Easy walk 3-5 min | Easy walk: 10 min  
Brisk walk: 20-30 min and add some high knee marches near the end | Total time: 28-45 min  
Easy walk: 5-10 min  
Brisk walk: 20-30 min or include a hill, incline, or stairs in your route  
Easy walk 3-5 min | Easy walk: 10 min  
Brisk walk: 20-30 min and add some high knee marches near the end | Alternate activity of your choice for 40+ min | Brisk walk: 30-35 min |
# Four-Week Walking Challenge Tracker

**Official Participant**

American Heart Association’s National Walking Day

## Number of Minutes Completed

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