

Walking Clubs

A Step in the Right Direction



Important:

This booklet contains information to assist community leaders or volunteers who are interested in organizing a walking club in their community. This booklet is intended to be an introductory and practical “how to” offering ideas, tools and strategies you might use to promote walking as a regular physical activity in a group setting. We encourage you to refer to the resources included in this booklet and also to consult with other professionals as needed.

How to Start a Walking Club

Introduction

Walking is the most popular form of physical activity for Canadians. It can be done by anyone, at any age and at little or no cost. As a regular physical activity, walking is a safe way to develop a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

Any excuse for a walk is good, whether it's for staying in shape, getting a breath of fresh air, improving digestion, sleeping better, feeling better, taking time for thinking, or having time with friends. Some people enjoy walking alone and others like to walk in groups.

Walking clubs are a great way to meet other active people, stay fit and discover safe and new places to walk in your communities. Some walking clubs are formal with fees, programs and designated leaders. Others are informal with just a group of friends who agree to walk together. Some clubs walk outdoors. Other clubs walk indoors at malls, recreation or wellness centres.

Before you leap to organize a club yourself, check to see if there are existing walking clubs in your area. Places to check include: seniors' organizations, schools, local physiotherapy clinics, recreation centers, regional health authorities, malls, or look for brochures in sport/running shoe stores.

Becoming more active is safe for most people. The Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) is a great resource for people who are considering becoming more physically active or who want to start exercising for the first time. The PAR-Q form can be found on page 11.



Why Form a Club?

- There is no club in your area.
- The clubs in your area are not active enough or do not have the kind of activities you want.
- You want to fill a niche that is unfilled by another club in your area: higher intensity walks, lower intensity walks, weeknight walks, group walks, morning workouts, more social aspects of walking together, etc.
- You want to build camaraderie among your walking friends with an identity, club name, t-shirts, etc.
- You want to build an incentive into your walking, such as awards for distance achieved or time accumulated.
- You want to have a newsletter, e-mail group, website, etc. to unite your walking friends.
- It increases your commitment to your walking routine.

Promoting a new walking club

Create a flyer or bulletin about starting a walking club and list the benefits of walking. (See sample invitation at the end of this booklet.) List a contact phone number on the flyer for people to get a hold of you, or simply say where the meeting will be held and encourage them to bring a friend. Make sure to set a safe public place to meet.

Distribute the flyer to local businesses and apartment complexes, local bulletin boards, or include information in community newsletters, etc. (Always check with building supervisors to ensure you may post bulletins.) Are there common walking paths in your area? Try to advertise adjacent to these locations. Advertise the meeting on a local website if you have access to one, or try promoting the club on your local cable channel. The walking club information could also be included in regular ongoing recreation programming brochures.

Another way to get the word out is through community service announcements in your local paper.

Your First Meeting or Walking Club Event

At the initial meeting, start a roster with names, contact information and available walking times. If you are going to have an informal group, circulate the list to each prospective member so everyone knows who's available and when. **Be sure to ask people's permission before circulating their personal information.**

If the club is formally organized, the list is a means of communication with members via newsletters by mail, e-mail, or phone calls.



Make sure to spend some time walking at your first gathering. Divide into smaller subgroups so everyone is walking with people who match their pace. In advance of this meeting you may want to investigate and map out several routes from which the group can choose. You may also want to have an expert from the community come in to demonstrate proper walking techniques. At the conclusion of the walk, consider a wrap-up that could include light refreshments, announcements, discussion of topics or invited guest speakers.

Topics for discussion could include:

- How many times will the group walk?
- Where will you walk?
- What time will you meet and how far will you go?
- Will cellphones and headphones be allowed during your walks?
- Do you want to have regular meetings?
- Will members call one another if someone can't make it, or will the group just walk with who ever shows up? Will the program have a leader in the community? You can make the group as formal or informal as you like.
- Will there be a warm-up and cool-down before and after your walks?
- Will you record and track your progress?
- Will your walking club have a name?

If your first meeting only has a couple of new members, don't worry. Often, new clubs start slowly and then build. Make your club fun, easy and accessible and start club events right away. Plan things correctly and follow through.

Walking Club Options

Consider whether your program will be lead by a community volunteer, an accredited fitness leader or be self-guided. Will it be a program in which your participants are formally registered?

SELF GUIDED WALKS could be adventurous, exploratory or interpretive in nature (ex: bird watching or dog walks.)

FORMAL WALKING PROGRAMS in which participants register could include fitness walking or fitness stroller-walking, hiking, snowshoeing, Nordic walking or learn to walk/run programs.



You may even choose to do a combination of these options so that participants have a choice on how they would like to participate.

Whether or not your club is formally organized, base your decisions on what criteria fits with members' needs and organizers' abilities.

Based on your community, available facilities or even the season, walking clubs can be held indoors or outdoors.

INDOOR WALKING CLUBS

A lack of sidewalks and adequate lighting or slippery winter streets can make walking outdoors difficult in some communities. Older adults may feel especially vulnerable to traffic, curb heights and weather conditions. In some communities wildlife issues may prevent safely walking outdoors. Why not winterize your walking plan by using recreation centres, schools or malls?

- Develop a register form that includes emergency contact information and a physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q).
- Investigate the best indoor options in your community, book the facility, book the walking club time and sign a facility use agreement.
- Decide if there is going to be a fee to cover facility use and/or administration costs for the club.
- Is there a location in the facility that could be developed as the communication centre for your club? The communication centre could include information about:
 - ▶ walking club events
 - ▶ physical activity information
 - ▶ suggested stretches
 - ▶ opportunities to be active in the community
 - ▶ nutrition information
 - ▶ a place to maintain walking log books

This could also be the place where special occasions or birthdays are celebrated.

OUTDOOR WALKING CLUBS

In our climate, as the weather turns warmer, people naturally want to be outdoors. Many of the administration considerations for the indoor clubs can be used with an outdoor format, but you may also consider:

- Varying the routes. Include short and long walks to accommodate the different fitness levels of club members. You will also need to keep safety, access and scenery in mind.

- Consider access to services such as parking, benches, toilets and phones.
- Providing maps for members showing the amenities, distances, walking surface materials and emergency numbers.
- If you plan on organizing group walks, designate a trailhead or starting point so the participants can gather at a specific time and place.
- Encourage participants to wear suitable footwear and clothing for the weather.
- Develop a contingency plan. Will you walk if it is raining or snowing? In the event of poor weather is there access to an indoor facility?

Managing the Risks

Consider what steps you can take to make the club operate safely and minimize the risk to walkers:

- Identify the risks that might occur.
- Assess the likelihood of risks occurring. Require walkers to use the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) as a way to measure their own readiness to participate in the club.
- Take steps to minimize risks.
- If your club is formally organized or operates special events, you will want to obtain legal advice on how to organize and operate your events and should also consult with an insurance professional.

Staying Motivated

There are different activities that you can do to keep your group interested and motivated, along with opening the club up to potential new members:

- Enter charity walk-a-thons, community parades or 5K events.
- Have refreshments or lunch after the walks.
- Spin off a dinner club or book club.
- Organize an all day walk to explore a new place (Manitoba trails, historic sites or a different part of the province).
- Organize a community walk to get others interested in walking. You could partner with another community organization to increase support and participation.



- Plan walking club special events:
 - ▶ guest speakers on walking related topics
 - ▶ group walks
 - ▶ walking excursions beyond the club environment
 - ▶ planned fitness warm-ups
 - ▶ activities that may include monthly theme days with prize draws.
- Guest speaker topics could include:
 - ▶ checking your walking form
 - ▶ choosing shoes with a certified podiatrist
 - ▶ resistance exercises to strengthen the upper and lower body
 - ▶ Nordic walking
 - ▶ injury prevention
 - ▶ Global Positioning System (GPS) adventure walking
- Consider ongoing promotions and interest in the club’s activities. Open up special events to the community at large (give consideration to a drop-in fee for guests) to encourage club membership.
- If participants are logging their walking activity, decide how this will be done. Consider having participants record such things as time, perceived intensity, distance or steps taken. Consider an incentive program, such as providing certificates or awards for attaining mileage marks or achieving other goals. (See a sample certificate on p.19.)
- Consider a pedometer loan program to encourage walking. Pedometers can inspire participants to increase the number of steps taken each day, no matter how active they are right now. To maintain health, 10,000 steps are recommended daily. For more information about purchasing **Manitoba *in motion*** pedometers, visit: manitobainmotion.ca/about/merchandise.
- Find and share articles or websites on walking.
- Share success stories. Recognize group members who have improved their health (achieved their goals) by walking.
- To keep participants engaged, consider creating a newsletter to promote the benefits of walking (stress reduction, helps to prevent heart disease, improves sleep and helps in weight loss and the maintenance of a healthy body weight).
- You may wish to create a club identification or logo for articles such as club hats, t-shirts or patches.
- Link into the current trend of “geo-caching”, a recreational activity in which someone “buries” something for others to try to find using a GPS receiver. This activity can add steps to an outdoor adventure.

- Consider club membership in a larger ongoing walking club where the benefits and incentives have already been set up.

These kinds of activities can help participants stay interested and motivated. Motivation may start to dwindle over time. This is normal. People often find that one of the biggest challenges they face with any fitness program is sticking with it over the long haul.

Remember that if you are the group's leader, your continued enthusiasm is very important! Talk about how walking has improved your life. Encourage interested members and welcome new walkers. Most of all, be a role model by being a committed walker yourself.

Evaluating Your Program

Evaluating programs helps you see if you've done what you hoped to do and can help you plan for future programs. Evaluation includes identifying what information you need, how and when to get it and how to use the information.

Whether your evaluation is complicated or simple, the basic steps are the same:

- plan your evaluation
- collect information
- understand your findings
- use and share your findings

Dress for Safety and Comfort

Wear appropriate clothing for your situation.

CONSIDER SAFETY

- wear reflective clothing
- walk against traffic
- use designated sidewalks or pathways
- bring water and a snack
- carry some change or a cellphone in case of emergency

DRESS FOR WINTER

- dress in layers – wind breaker, fleece, turtleneck
- warm pants and long underwear
- toque, scarf, gloves or mittens
- warm jacket
- comfortable winter boots or shoes
- sunscreen with UVA/UVB protection
- sunglasses



DRESS FOR SUMMER

- wear loose fitting, light colored tightly woven clothes (long sleeves and pants to protect from the sun and mosquitoes)
- choose breathable fabrics
- comfortable shoes
- sunscreen with UVA/UVB protection
- sunglasses
- hat to protect face and neck

The Perfect Fit for Every Fitness Level

Start slowly! As the group progresses, gradually increase walking speed and pump the arms to increase intensity. Once the group is comfortable with this, progress to more difficult terrain such as hills. Encourage the group to work at their own pace. Make sure the group has a plan of who is at what stage of walking so everyone can meet at the same final destination point (ex: some may go a shorter distance, but will take the same amount of time as the others).

Encourage participants to walk at a pace that increases their breathing and heart rate, but is comfortable enough to maintain for a period of time. (See sample participant handout on p. 17.)

Monitor Progress

After a few weeks, participants may notice some immediate benefits such as:

- increased energy
- decreased stress
- better sleep
- walking longer and faster
- increase in daily steps (as measured by a pedometer)

In order to see continued improvements, encourage participants to challenge themselves. For variety and challenge:

- try a treadmill, if available
- add mini-speed intervals (for example, walk at a faster pace for 30 seconds followed by a recovery pace for 30 seconds)
- add stairs or hills
- substitute a slow jog
- create a walking circuit (add other exercises like lunges, squats, bicep curls, etc. to the walk)
- walk on a variety of terrains
- change the direction of a route




Online Walking Assistance

Online walking clubs are beneficial to explore. They can help you set up the structure of your own local club and can assist with the following:

- provide training tips and programs
- online logbooks
- newsletters
- incentive programs
- the opportunity to network with other walkers
- nutrition information
- FAQ
- motivational tips
- information on equipment
- injury prevention
- cross training information
- opportunities to post and promote your own club events

Online Resources

1. *In motion* Walking Workout – Walking Your Way to Health at www.manitobainmotion.ca
2. Develop walking club leaders in your community by registering to become an Active Living Facilitator. For more information contact the Manitoba Fitness Council at www.manitobafitnesscouncil.ca
3. Order the resource *Walking – the Activity of a Lifetime* for your participants at inmotion@gov.mb.ca
4. Province of Manitoba *in motion* website and library pedometer loan program at www.manitobainmotion.ca
5. Register for Moving Around Manitoba and take a virtual walk around the province at www.movingaroundmanitoba.ca
6. Stay up to date on Manitoba Trails events at www.mrta.mb.ca
7. Plan an excursion with Nature Manitoba at www.naturemanitoba.ca
8. Learn about active transportation and resource sustainability for home, schools, workplaces and your community at www.greenactioncentre.ca

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9. For walking events and resources, visit Prairie Pathfinders at www.prairiepathfinders.mb.ca
 10. Walk for Wellness Challenge – an on-line pedometer based active living group challenge www.walkforwellnesschallenge.ca
 11. For walking or jogging training plans, visit The Manitoba Marathon at www.manitobamarathon.mb.ca
 12. Alberta Centre for Active Living for resources and tools about walking/pedometers www.centre4activeliving.ca/category.cgi?c=3; s=16
 13. British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association Walking Program tools and resources www.bcrpa.bc.ca/walking/
 14. Walk this Way – for on-line training and tools and resources to promote walking <http://parc.ophea.net/walk-way>
 15. Chatelaine Magazine has the “*On the Move*” Walking Club at www.chatelaine.com/en/article/18948--chatelaine-walking-club
 16. Register your walking group with America on the Move at <https://aom3.americaonthemove.org/get-active.aspx>
 17. Volkssport Association of international walking clubs at www.ava.org
 18. International Council on Active Aging walking resources can be found at www.icaa.cc/walkinghome.htm
 19. Walking Clubs and Groups at www.thewalkingsite.com/clubs.html
 20. Cooking Light 10 Great Walking Workouts at www.cookinglight.com/cooking/hl/fitness
 21. Connect with outdoor enthusiasts at www.clubtread.com
 22. Learn more about geocaching at www.geocaching.com/faq
 23. For on-line clinics, visit The Running Room at – www.runningroom.com

The Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q)¹

It's a good idea to check with a doctor before becoming more physically active. Below is a summary of the PAR-Q and a good starting point to determine your physical activity 'readiness'. Answer the seven questions below and if you are between the ages of 15 and 69, the PAR-Q will help tell you if you should check with your doctor before you start.

1. Has your doctor ever said you have a heart condition and that you should only do physical activity recommended by a doctor?
2. Do you feel pain in your chest when you do physical activity?
3. In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
4. Do you lose your balance because of dizziness or do you ever lose consciousness?
5. Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
6. Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs (for example, water pills) for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
7. Do you know of any other reason why you should not do physical activity?

If you answered "YES" to one or more questions, talk to your doctor before you start becoming much more physically active.

If you answered "NO" to all questions, you can be reasonably sure you can start becoming more physically active right now. Start slowly and progress gradually because it is the safest, easiest way to go.

Delay becoming much more active if:

- you are not feeling well because of a temporary illness such as a cold or a fever. Wait until you feel better.
- you are or may be pregnant. Talk to your doctor.

Note: If your health changes so that you then answer "YES" to any of the above questions, talk to your fitness or health professional.

¹ Adapted from: Public Health Agency of Canada, The Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire. www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/questionnaire.html.

Interested in joining a Walking Club?

Introductory Meeting and Registration

warm-up and walk
guest speaker
discussion on club format
light refreshments

Date/time: _____

Location: _____

For information: _____

BENEFITS OF WALKING:

relieves stress • increases your energy level
assists with weight management • improves self-image
makes you feel good • builds friendships and more!

Walking Club Registration

Name	
Address	
Home phone	
Work phone	
Email address	
Birth date	
Emergency contact name	
Emergency contact phone number	
Date of registration	
Club fee paid	
Date club registration kit/ logbooks received	

Benefits of membership in the walking club include:

(check off what is appropriate for your club)

walking logbooks

regular club newsletters (including articles on motivational tips, training programs, injury prevention, information on equipment, cross training, nutrition information, frequently asked questions, etc.)

incentive programs

guest speakers

regularly scheduled group walks

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

Return completed registration form and the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) form to:

Walking Club Goal Setting Contract

I will:

Milestones:

Month 1: _____ by date _____

Month __: _____ by date _____

Month __: _____ by date _____

Goal to be achieved on: _____

How I will track my progress:

(suggestions: food and walking diary, online tracker, etc.)

How I will celebrate:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Take a Step in the Right Direction

GETTING GOING

1. **Warm-Up.** Walk slowly for the first 5 minutes.
2. **Stretch.** Do some light stretching that includes the following muscle groups: quadriceps (front of thigh), calves, upper and lower back, hamstring (back of thigh), chest, hip. Hold each stretch for 10 seconds. (Refer to the *in motion Walking Workout – Walking Your Way to Health* handbook or the *Walking – The Activity of a Lifetime* booklet for stretching ideas. Available at www.manitobainmotion.ca)
3. **Walk Briskly.** Use the talk test to check your intensity.
4. **Cool Down.** Walk slowly for the last 5 minutes.
5. **Stretches.** Repeat stretches, holding them for 20 seconds each.

TALK TEST

INTENSITY	TALK TEST
Light	I can talk and sing
Moderate	I can't sing, but I can talk
Vigorous	I can't talk

For variety and challenge:

- try a treadmill, if available
- add mini speed intervals (for example, walk at a faster pace for 30 seconds followed by a recovery pace for 30 seconds)
- add stairs or hills
- substitute a slow jog
- create a walking circuit (add other exercises such as lunges, squats, bicep curls to the walk)
- walk on a variety of terrains
- change the direction of a route

TM
in motion

Physical Activity - do it for life!

Congratulations for getting **in motion** and creating a healthier Manitoba.
Nous vous remercions de votre participation **en mouvement**
envers un Manitoba en meilleure santé.

Presented to / Présenté à

for participating in / pour sa participation à

Date

Certified by / Certifié par

^{MC}
en mouvement

L'activité physique, c'est bon pour la vie!

In motion is a provincial strategy to help all Manitobans make physical activity part of their daily lives for health and enjoyment.

En mouvement est une stratégie provinciale qui permet d'aider tous les Manitobains et Manitobaines à inclure l'activité physique dans leur vie quotidienne pour être bonne santé et pour le plaisir.

Manitoba 

