

Power up your walking

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Summarized by Chris Netto

Walking is certainly a good form of exercise. Power walking or speed walking, a modified version of race walking, can improve cardiovascular fitness and burn calories. Speed walking generally means you are walking as briskly as you can just short of running. Speed walking is an inexpensive, an easier and safer mode of exercise because of the lower impact putting less stress on hips, back, legs, knees and ankles. A good race or speed walker can move faster than 6 miles per hour or a 10 minute mile whereas a slower walker or stroller moves at about 2 miles per hour or a 30 minute mile. Usually a brisk walker walks around a pace of 4 miles per hour or a 15 minute mile. Note that calories burned and miles walked will depend on individual weight and stride length of the walker.

The Journal of the American Medical Association published a study from the Copper Institute for Aerobics Research in Dallas Texas reported fitness gains for women who walked 3, 4 or 5 miles per hour 5 days per week and those women who walked the fastest for the 24 week period had benefited most ...as much as runners. Similar results were found in another study reported in the International Journal of Sports Medicine achieving results as those seen in runners

To power up your walking, consider practicing the following walking techniques:

Maintain an upright posture...keeping head up, chin level, chest open, shoulders relaxed, and back straight. Arms bent at 90 degrees with a gently closed fist.

As you step with one leg, swing your opposite arm in sync with your stride. Your hips should be in line with your shoulders, but as you increase your speed they will rotate naturally.

When stepping take smaller steps. Over striding will slow you down. Lead with the heel when striking the ground. Have your toes up. Planting your feet along an imaginary straight line also gives you more hip swivel action rather than a side to side sway.

Don't bounce or sway your upper body.

When swinging your arms, pump from your shoulders, not from your elbows, keeping your arms close to your ribs allowing the arm to swing more quickly and in sync with the feet, don't let the arms cross center of your body, don't let the arms rise above chest level and on the swing back don't raise your fists higher than your buttocks.

Start with walking 10 to 20 minutes per session at a pace that challenges while being appropriate for you. Remember to listen to your body. The pace should not be overwhelming. Gradually pick up your pace from week to week as it feels right for you. A good goal is around 4 mph for greater fitness gains. The more intense motion of speed or power walking boosts muscle activity in your hips and ankles more than just regular walking or strolling and works the upper body as well, however walking at a slower pace will provide fitness gains too. And as with any fitness activity overuse injuries are possible and it depends on how fast, how intense, and how often you do the activity.

How fast do you walk?

To estimate your walking speed, count how many steps you take per minute and compare the results with the table below. Table from June 2012 University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter

Steps per minute	Minutes per mile	Miles per hour(mph)
70	30	2.0
90	24	2.5
105	20	3.0
120	17	3.5
140	15	4.0
160	13	4.5
175	12	5.0
190	11	5.5
210+	10 or less	6.0+

Note: This table is based on an average stride (2.5 feet long). If your stride is closer to 3 feet long an easy way to estimate your speed is to count how many steps you take per minute and divide by 30. Thus if you are taking about 105 steps per minute, you are covering about 3.5 miles per hour.