



## Walking Tips for Seniors

### TIP

### WHY

### HOW

#### **Warm up and cool down.**

Stretching improves circulation and decreases build-up of lactic acid - the chemical by-product that causes muscles to ache. It also helps alleviate any muscle stiffness and prevents future muscle strain. As a result, you can walk further, longer and injury free.

Before and after walking allow ample time to perform a few simple movements, stretching the hamstrings, calves, achilles tendons and shins.

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#### **Choose proper footgear.**

Buying shoes is the only real expenditure necessary for walking, so don't cut corners on your shoe budget; treat your feet well!

If you experience swelling in your feet, try on athletic shoes in the afternoon - when your feet are most swollen - to ensure an accurate fit. Look for a shoe that is stable from side to side; well-cushioned; enables you to walk smoothly and comfortably; and gives you enough room to wiggle your toes, yet be snug in the heel. Also, look for shoes that carry the American Podiatric Medical Association's Seal of Approval.

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#### **Pay attention to your feet.**

Changes and/or pain in the feet and ankles are not normal and could indicate a serious foot ailment or circulatory problem. Warning: Self-treatment can turn a minor problem into a major one, making fitness more difficult.

Become familiar with your feet and ankles by examining them - before and after - walking. If you notice red spots, swelling, or other abnormalities, including numbness, tingling or burning, consult a podiatric physician as soon as possible.

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**Walk on soft ground.**

With age, the natural shock absorbers (or “fat padding”) in your feet deteriorate, as does bone density, particularly in women. These factors combined make seniors prone to stress fractures. Softer ground is more foot-friendly, producing less shock than harder surfaces.

If possible, walk on grass or dirt paths that are flat, even and well manicured.

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**Avoid walking in cold weather.**

Cold weather causes numbness, limiting your ability to detect trauma or wounds to the feet. It also makes surfaces harder, exerting undue shock on the feet and ankles.

Head to the local mall or walk at an indoor track or exercise facility.

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**If you have diabetes, use extra precaution.**

If you suffer from diabetes, you are prone to infection from even minor injuries. Many people with diabetes experience a loss of sensation in the feet, making it difficult to detect injury. Untreated or improper self-treatment of ailments could lead to serious, permanent damage or possible amputation.

Check your feet daily for redness, blisters or injury. If you experience any numbness, tingling or have wounds or abnormalities of any kind, see a podiatric physician immediately.

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**Exercise smart.**

Establishing an exercise program is a huge undertaking, and even the most minimal injury could “sideline” you for days - even months. Knowing your limit and exercising with caution can ward off injuries and frustration.

Set appropriate and realistic goals. Pace yourself, choose an activity you like, increase your exercise program gradually, and pay attention to what your body, including your feet, tells you. Drink fluids on hot days or during very strenuous activities, to avoid heat stroke and heat exhaustion.