BEGINNING A FITNESS
WALKING PROGRAM

You know you want to begin a fitness program, but don't know where to start. It's easy! Walking is one of the easiest and most profitable forms of exercise. All you need is a good pair of shoes, comfortable clothing, and desire.

How to start: First of all, start out slow and easy. Just walk out the door. For most people this means head out the door, walk for 10 minutes, and walk back. That's it? Yes, that's it. Do this every day for a week. If this was easy for you, add five minutes to your walks next week (total walking time 25 minutes). Keep adding 5 minutes until you are walking as long as desired.

WATCH your posture. Walk tall. Think of elongating your body. Hold your head up and eyes forward. Your shoulders should be down, back and relaxed. Tighten your abdominal muscles and buttocks and fall into a natural stride.

Be sure to drink plenty of water before, during, and after walking. Incorporate a warm up, cool down and stretches into your routine. Start your walk at a slow warm up pace, stop and do a few warm up / flexibility drills. Then walk for the desired length of time. End your walk with the slower cool down pace and stretch well after your walk. Stretching will make you feel great and assist in injury prevention.

The toughest thing about starting a fitness program is developing a habit. Walking daily will help (a minimum of 5 days a week is a good goal). You should walk fast enough to reach your target heart rate, but you should not be gasping for air.

After you have formed the habit you will want to evaluate your program and your goals. Here are some general guidelines:

If you are walking for the general health benefits try to walk 30 minutes a day, most days of the week, at a "talking" pace. (Talking pace means you have elevated breathing, but you can still carry a conversation.)

To improve cardiovascular fitness you should walk 3 to 4 days a week, 20 to 30 minutes at a very fast pace. At this pace you are breathing hard but not gasping for air.

If you are walking for weight loss you should walk a minimum of five days a week, 45 to 60 minutes at a brisk pace.

Once you can comfortably walk for 30 to 60 minutes 5 to 6 days a week you may want to put more "umpf" or speed into your routine. Follow these easy tips for walking faster (or for some real speed learn to racewalk).

Zero to Sixty in Twelve Weeks - An easy to follow schedule to get you walking 60 minutes in 12 weeks.

Notice: If you're new to walking, start off with slow, short sessions and build your way up gradually. If you have any health concerns or medical conditions, be sure to check with your doctor for advice before you begin a routine.