WARM UPS AND STRETCHING

Make every walk a complete workout by including these elements, and following the correct sequence. Neglecting to do so will make walking more difficult, and increase the risk of injury.

1) **Warm up** - Warming up is exercising at a lower intensity in order to get the blood circulating and let your body know that you are preparing for exercise. For many of your walks it will only be necessary to warm up about five minutes. As you progress through your walking program you will need to warm up longer on days you will do your fast workouts.

2) **Flexibility exercises** - These exercises are part of your warm up and should be done after you have warmed up with 5 to 10 minutes of easy walking. The faster you plan to walk the more time you will need to dedicate to flexibility exercises. There are many different exercises in this group. Here are a few to try:

- **Toe points** -- Stand on one leg and lift the other foot off the floor. Gently point your toe and hold for a few seconds. Next flex your foot pointing your toes up. Do this five or ten times on each foot.

- **Ankle Circles** -- While standing on one leg lift the other foot off the floor. Gently point your toe and rotate your ankle. Do about ten circles in each direction. This exercise can be performed while standing, sitting, or lying on your back with leg raised.

- **Overhead Reach** -- Stand with your feet hip distance apart. Reach up with one arm and then reach over your head and to the opposite side. Keep your hips steady and your shoulders straight. Relax and repeat with the other side.

- **The Twist** -- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your arms straight out, parallel to ground. Keep your lower body stationary while swinging your arms from side to side. Do this several times to loosen up your waist, back, and shoulders.

- **Arm Circles** -- Hold your arms straight out to your side parallel to the ground. Make small circles going backward, gradually getting larger and larger. Rest for a second and do the same thing in the forward direction. As you improve your pace you may wish to include more flexibility exercises into your routine. This becomes more important on your fast/hard workout days.

3) **Walk** - Now that you have warmed up you should be ready to complete your walk at your normal walking pace. For the first few weeks do not push too hard. Your breathing should be elevated, but you should not be gasping for air. A rule of thumb that works for most people is... If you can not talk you are walking too fast, if you can carry a tune you are walking too slow.
4) **Cool down** - At the end of your walk you need to walk at a slower pace to cool down. The harder you have worked out the longer you should cool down. In the beginning your walks are very short and you only need to cool down a couple of minutes. As your walking time and intensity extends so should your cool down period.

5) **Stretch** - This is such a neglected area for many people. Start off right and take the time to stretch **AFTER** every workout. In the beginning stretches should take at least 5 minutes. As you increase distance and pace you will probably need to stretch longer.

**Important rules for stretching:**

1) **Never stretch cold muscles**. The best time to stretch is after your walk. If you have problem areas they can be stretched prior to your walk, but only do this after you have warmed up.

2) Do not bounce. Go into a stretch slowly and hold gently. Stretch to the point of feeling a gentle pull, but never to the point of pain

3) Hold each stretch for 30 to 40 seconds. If you have problems with a particular area stretch that area twice. (hold for 30-40 seconds release, then stretch again.)

There are so many stretches it is impossible to cover them all. Be sure to stretch all the major muscle groups, and put extra focus on any areas you have trouble with. Find a few recommended stretches below:

- **Calf Stretch** -- Stand on your toes on a step or curb. Hold on to something for balance. Remove your left foot and slowly allow the right heel to move down. Hold this position. Be sure to keep you body upright and straight. Release and repeat on the other side.

- **Another calf stretch** -- Take a big step forward with your left foot, keeping your right heel on the ground. Hold the position and repeat on the other side. Be sure to keep your body upright and your abs tight, do not arch your back.

- **Shin Stretch** -- Standing up, hold on to a stationary object. Stand with your weight on one leg and straighten it. Place your other foot on the ground, with toes pointed and your toenails toward the floor. With the tops of your toes touching the ground, roll your foot and leg forward, from the ankle. Release and repeat on the other side.

- **Hamstring and Lower Back** -- Slowly bend forward from your waist with your knees slightly bent. Reach for the floor and hold. Only bend as far as comfortable.

- **Outer thigh and buttocks and spine** -- While lying on your back bring your right knee up. Place your left hand on your thigh and gently pull it over to your left side. Do not pull at the knee. Your shoulders, left leg and back should remain flat. Pull gently. Then repeat on the other side.

- **Lower back** -- While lying on your back, bring both knees up towards the chest with the hands. Round the lower back and relax into the stretch. Don't do this stretch on a hard surface...it will bruise the spine!
- **Quadriceps Stretch** -- Standing up, hold on to a stationary object. Bend your right knee, bringing your foot toward your buttocks. Keeping your left knee slightly bent, grasp your right ankle with the opposite hand. Slowly pull your leg up and back, bringing your foot as high as comfortable. Repeat with other leg. (To protect your knee... think of pulling the quads back rather than pulling the foot toward your buttocks.)

- **Shoulder Stretch** -- Standing upright, cross left arm over chest. Place your right hand on your upper arm and pull arm in tight to chest. Be sure to keep shoulders down and do not pull at the elbow. Hold, and then repeat stretch with other arm.

- **Neck Relaxesr** -- Turn and look over your right shoulder and hold. Repeat on the left side. Don't hyper-extend the neck, or tilt it backwards. Next, gently drop the head so that the ear goes towards the right shoulder and hold. Return to upright position. Repeat forward and on the left side. Keep the spine in an upright position and don't hyper-extend the neck, jerk, or tilt the head backwards.