

A step in the **RIGHT** **DIRECTION**

Running is the best workout to torch fat, right? Well, not so fast. *H&W* discovers the power of walking and how it could help you reach your health goals

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When I was younger, my mum would attempt to prise my hands from the TV control by persuading me to go for a 'nice family walk'. Don't get me wrong, I had an active upbringing so it wasn't the walking part that made me want to revolt, I just thought 'what was the point'? I didn't think it was productive, nor did I feel the need to travel on foot in a circle just to reach my home again. In other words, I thought it was a pretty aimless pursuit. But, fast forward a few years and there's nothing I like more than listening to a podcast and going for a countryside stroll. However, if you're lucky enough to have running accessible to you, your thoughts might be in the same mind frame as 10-year-old me, making you wonder if walking really is as effective as pounding the pavements for weight loss and burning calories. For the record, it turns out it can be. Our experts decipher how to make serious steps to an effective walking workout.

SLOW AND STEADY

LISS, or low intensity steady state training, has been an underrated form of exercise for years. New research by Decathlon has revealed that 28 percent of Brits believe that a sweaty workout means you're burning more fat, but that's simply not true, according to consultant physiotherapist, Benjamin Coffey (surreyphysio.co.uk). "Many of us think that exercise must be hard and intense to be of any benefit, but walking certainly shouldn't

be underestimated as a good workout." So, what are the advantages of walking? "The great thing about walking is that you can just open the front door and you'll be doing it, without any stress or mental preparation. It's also easier on the joints and tendons than running and it can even be a more effective way to lose weight."

STEP RIGHT UP

So, we've established that power walking is a legitimate form of exercise, but are there any pitfalls? "The issue with steady state exercise is that it requires a lot of time to achieve the same level of aerobic conditioning as you would expect from high intensity exercise," explains Vicki Anstey, leading fitness figure and founder of Barreworks (barreworks.co.uk). In other words, when comparing running to walking as a means of quicker results, running would win hands down, due to the fact that you're exerting more force and therefore require more energy, says Dr Flaminia Ronca, senior teaching fellow at the Institute of Sport, Exercise & Health (ISEH)*, (hcahealthcare.co.uk). "If you're looking for cost-effectiveness of your time, you'll want to run a mile [instead of walk it], but the truth is, most of us would rather not!" So, how can we improve our fitness, while being mindful of injuries and niggles? "The most effective way of burning calories and increasing your cardiovascular health is using a combination of low and high bouts of intensity called interval training," Dr Ronca recommends. Think: walking up inclines or adding some bodyweight exercises, such as squats and lunges, to your daily route.



FEEL THE BURN

Of course, there's a big difference between going for a leisurely stroll and walking like you're on a mission, so how do we know if our walk is having a real effect on burning calories and torching fat? "As long as you're working around 55 to 70 percent of your maximum heart rate (or five to six on a scale of one to 10), you'll be in the right zone to keep fuel consumption primarily to fat," states Vicki. "By driving up the intensity [of your walk], you'll boost your metabolism through post-exercise oxygen consumption and work your muscles, ligaments and cardiovascular health far more." Recovery is also an important factor when considering fat loss. As Benjamin explains, most people can walk for much longer than they can run and more frequently too, without getting tired and needing to rest before they're able to exercise again. "This means that someone who walks daily can burn close to the same amount of calories as someone who runs for less time, less often."

TAKE YOUR WALK TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Wondering how to maximise your walk? Sam Gregory, head trainer at F45 Stratford shares his tips to help give it a leg up.

1 TURN YOUR WALK INTO A CIRCUIT CLASS

“Set a timer and for every two minutes, stop and do 20 squats, 20 lunges and 20 star jumps. This will definitely add an extra level of intensity to your walk.”

2 LET’S HIIT IT!

“HIIT training [high intensity interval training] is a great way of improving your fitness, as well as burning body fat and building lean muscle. So, start with five minutes of brisk walking, sprint for 20 seconds and walk slowly for one minute and 40 seconds. Repeat this eight times and finish with a five-minute slow walk to recover.”

3 HIKE UP HILLS

“One of the easiest ways to enhance your daily walk is to go up hills, small or large. Not only will this have a great knock on effect for how energised you will feel after your walk, but you should also find it easier to maintain a faster walk than before, as long as you are not picking a flat route!”

4 GET SOME HEAD SPACE

“Walking is a great way to switch off from the stress and strain that these unprecedented times can cause. Use the time for you via a meditation app or, even better, leave the phone at home and focus on the beauty that can be found all around us. Every time your mind drifts back to your stress, reset and focus on the walk.”

5 ACTIVE REST

“Lots of us will be working out more than ever at the moment, so it’s important to get adequate rest and recovery. Keep it slow, focus on your breathing and even incorporate some nice, low level stretches along the way. Your body will definitely thank you for it as it enables you to work towards a reachable, measurable and obtainable target.”

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

It’s not just the physical benefits that walking provides: our mental health gets a boost, too. As we know, the advantages to outdoor exercise are three-fold: reduced stress and anxiety, improved mood and a deeper connection to nature. “Simply being outside has a positive effect on your mental health,” says Dr Courtney Kipps, consultant in sport and exercise medicine at the Institute of Sport, Exercise & Health (ISEH)*, (hcahealthcare.co.uk). “Exercising in the outdoors magnifies these effects and is therefore ideal for relieving anxiety, stress and depression.” Flaminia echoes this, as she claims going for a walk is a sure-fire way to get your brain into action. “Research also shows that exercise can boost cognition, for example your creativity, memory and speed. So, if you need to figure out a new strategy for an upcoming project or prepare to study a new topic at work, take a walk while you ponder before getting back to the books.”

*in partnership with the Princess Grace Hospital, part of HCA UK

THE EXERCISE EDGE

If you have the time and desire, then a power walk over distance can be a great way to increase your fitness levels and get the head space we sometimes really need, not to mention a great opportunity to get your #walktowellbeing in! So our experts have proved that walking really doesn’t get the credit it deserves, but to kick things up a notch, Vicki suggests doing high intensity activities alongside your daily hike for maximum results. “Our bodies will always use fat stores for fuel consumption when we’re resting, but we do need to try higher intensity activities every now and then to get a training effect and improve our overall fitness.” However if you’re just starting out, walking is a great place to begin, advises Dr Courtney. “The important thing is to simply start and then you can build it up as your fitness increases. Set yourself sensible, specific and achievable short-term goals and then review them as you begin to tick them off.” There you go: an activity that you don’t need any equipment for that provides you with mental and physical health benefits, and you can start right away. Ready to give it a try? We’ll be right behind you every step of the way. **H&W**