

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
- 2) Flexibility exercises
- 3) Walk
- 4) Cool down
- 5) Stretch

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.

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.

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.

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.