Putting walking to the test

The British Heart Foundation and The Countryside Agency funded a pioneering and rigorous trial to measure the health benefits of walking. More than 250 people were involved. Half were invited regularly to go walking in organised groups or with family or friends, whilst the other half were simply given information about the importance of exercise. A team of experts tracked the health and fitness of both groups. The results were published in a medical journal in spring 2002. A short summary is available by telephoning the WHI team on 01242 533258.

You may also be interested in one of our regular fundraising events, ‘Walkabout UK’, an annual series of sponsored walks which takes place around the country throughout the year. For more information please ring your nearest British Heart Foundation office - the telephone number can be found in Yellow Pages.

Walking the Way to Health initiative (WHI)

The British Heart Foundation and The Countryside Agency have joined forces to get more people walking in their local community - with benefits to their health and the local environment. We are helping people to choose, signpost and promote routes for walking; to organise guided walks for people who like walking in company; provide information about healthy walking and to make the physical environment in town and countryside more interesting and safe to walk in.

If you would like advice about setting up a local walking scheme contact the WHI team on 01242 533258.
How to keep your heart healthy and happy by walking your way to fitness

Welcome to a healthy heart and a more energetic you - the easy way!
Your heart is the powerhouse of the body, it pushes oxygen and nutrient-rich blood to every cell that needs it. The heart is basically a muscle - but it’s the most important muscle we’ve got. And it needs exercise, so that it can pump more blood with each beat and save you energy.

Exercise doesn’t have to mean exhausting runs, buying fancy equipment or joining an expensive health club. Walking gives your heart the workout it needs. All you need to do is build brisk walking into your daily routine.

Did you know?
Simply walking for 30 minutes, at least five times a week, without over-exerting yourself, can make you healthier. It doesn’t have to be in one session, break it down into two or three 10-15 minute sessions.

Walking:
- Reduces blood pressure. As we get older blood pressure tends to rise which can be very risky in later life. Walking helps keep your blood pressure down.
- Studies have shown that regular walkers have improved levels of cholesterol - the fat in the blood clearly linked with heart disease - with more of the protective HDL cholesterol which is better for you.
- Tones up your muscles and strengthens your bones. Regular brisk walking also wards off osteoporosis - the unpleasant and often painful thinning of the bones experienced by many women after menopause.
- Helps to control your weight. Being overweight can lead to raised blood pressure. Physical activity is at least as important as diet in keeping trim.

Did you know?
A recent study found that men who take regular brisk walks have less than half the rate of coronary heart disease and heart attacks than those who do not.

Your easy walking action plan
Walking's a great way to get the exercise your heart needs. Walk regularly, and build up to it gradually. It may take around 8 - 12 weeks to start feeling the difference. But when you do, you’ll know it’s worth it.

Use this guide if you are not used to physical activity and need to build up gradually. Consult your doctor first if you have heart disease. Don’t go walking if you have a raised temperature.

Weeks 1 and 2 - Frequency: 2 - 3 times a week
Start off with 10 - 15 minutes at your normal walking pace. Try not to stop and admire the view too often!

Weeks 3 and 4 - Frequency: 2 - 3 times a week
Time yourself on the outward journey while walking at your normal pace for 10 minutes. On each homeward journey increase your pace slightly so that the return journey takes less than 10 minutes.

Weeks 5 and 6 - Frequency: 3 - 4 times a week
Outward journey timed at 12 minutes. Try to alternate your normal pace with some brisk walking. On the first homeward journey record your time and try to improve on that time by a few seconds, whenever you go for a walk.

Weeks 7 and 8 - Frequency: 4 - 5 times a week
Outward journey timed at 15 minutes. Prolong the periods you walk at a brisk pace. Aim to be able to walk briskly all the way home.

Week 9 and beyond - Frequency: 5 times a week
You should now be capable of 30 minutes’ continuous brisk walking. If you can’t manage 30 minutes - remember that two 15 minute periods are just as beneficial.

Adapted from the YMCA Walking Guide.

Here’s how to make brisk walking part of your life.
- Build a walk into your journey to work. Get off the bus early, or park away from the office. Don’t use a lift or escalator. Walking up and down stairs is really good for the heart.

Enjoy the challenge of longer walks in shorter times.
- Save the expense of driving to the shops - walk instead.
- Involve the family. Walking is good for children too, and it’s a great way of exploring the countryside.