

Counting steps towards better health – using your pedometer



The logo for 'be active wa' features the text 'be active wa' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Above the text is a stylized white wave or arch graphic. The letter 'i' in 'active' is orange, and the letter 'a' in 'wa' is also orange.

www.patf.dpc.wa.gov.au

The Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce

The Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce (PATF) was formed in 2001 with the aim of increasing the physical activity levels of West Australians by 5% (from 58% to 63%) over the next 10 years.

PATF is funded from the contributions of key government departments: Health, Sport and Recreation, Planning and Infrastructure, Education and Training and Premier and Cabinet.

The Taskforce has also been successful in securing grants from Lotterywest and Healthway. These funds are being used to support a number of the Taskforce's initiatives.

Acknowledgement; sections of the text used in this booklet are based upon the National Heart Foundation's publication "*Making Every Step Count*".

Enjoy being active every day

Being active every day is important for a healthy body and mind. A pedometer is a great incentive to help you make physical activity part of your day.

This simple tool measures the number of steps taken, distance travelled and some models calculate the calories burned.

By measuring your walking activity you can see how much more you may need to do to gain a health benefit.

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and depression.

The good news is that it's never too late to start – improvements in health are immediate and can make a lasting difference.

Think of physical activity as an opportunity, not an inconvenience.

NB – The levels of physical activity recommended in this brochure only relate to adults, as children need to do more.





Benefits

Brisk walking is a great activity for people of all ages and regular walking helps you to:

- feel great and be more energetic
- manage your weight
- achieve healthier blood cholesterol and blood pressure
- build stronger bones and muscles
- reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes and other diseases
- relax, boost your confidence and mood
- feel a sense of achievement and satisfaction
- reduce car use and traffic congestion

How often, how much, for how long?

Walk every day!

The National Physical Activity Guidelines recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, on most days of the week.

Brisk walking is walking at an energetic pace that still allows you to talk without any huffing and puffing.

The good news is that the 30 minutes doesn't have to be done all at once. It can be done in blocks of ten minutes or more, if this suits your routine better.

It is also important to take other opportunities to be active when you can.

When you're using your pedometer to count steps, aim for 10,000 steps each day. You can build up to this gradually (see the example on the next page).

Thirty minutes of walking equals about 3000 steps, so it is very important to be active and walk at other times of the day.

Other short bursts of activity towards your 10,000 steps might include:

- using the stairs instead of the lift or escalator
- parking your car a little further away from your destination
- walking rather than driving between sites when at work
- walking instead of using motorised transport on the farm
- walking to a colleague's office instead of sending an email.



How am I doing?

Setting Goals

There are two ways you can measure your achievements – by distance or by the number of steps taken.

You can set your own realistic goals and the easiest way to do this is to wear your pedometer for a day and measure the number of steps and/or distance. You can then set a daily target to work towards during the next few weeks.

For example:

If in your usual day you walk 2000 steps, aim to reach 3000 steps a day by the end of the next week, and work towards 10,000 steps by week nine or ten.

If in your usual day you walk 5000 steps, aim to reach 6000 steps by the end of the next week, 7000 the week after and increase to 10,000 steps by week five.

If you are measuring distance, you might want to increase your usual distance by one kilometre each week.

Why not measure steps or distance on your favourite beach walk, dog walk or around the local park, to help you to find out what is achievable?

Any increase in your activity will improve your health.

If in your usual day you already walk 10,000 steps, congratulations! You have reached the level of physical activity that is regarded as good for your health. To further improve cardiovascular fitness or to lose weight, try increasing gradually to 15,000 steps a day.

Be active walking plan

Make copies of this chart for each week and put a copy on your fridge or desk.

BE ACTIVE WALKING PLAN

NAME:

Write down your walking GOAL (to be reached by Sunday)

eg. 3000 or 5000 steps a day, 30 or 60 minutes a day or 3 or 5kms a day. Aim for a brisk pace.

Record achievements each day

DAY:

STEPS:

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY



Safety tips for moderate physical activity

If you have a chronic health condition (eg heart disease, diabetes, asthma), it is advisable to consult your doctor before you start any regular physical activity.

Here are some walking tips to get you on your way:

- choose comfortable clothes to suit the weather. Choose shoes with soft or shock absorbing soles. In summer, use sun-screen and wear a hat.
- start slowly and at a low level. Build up your pace over a few weeks. *Don't overdo it.*
- drink plenty of water before, during and after any physical activity, including walking. It's a good idea to get into the habit of taking a small bottle of drinking water with you.
- avoid intense physical activity straight after meals or alcohol or if you have an illness, such as a cold.
- if you feel discomfort, unusual chest pain, become breathless or have a rapid or irregular heart beat during walking, stop immediately and seek medical advice.
- remember to maximise your health, be active every day, don't smoke and enjoy healthy eating.

Wearing Your Pedometer

- Set up according to the instructions supplied with your pedometer.
- Put your pedometer on in the morning as soon as you wake up. Clip it to the waist of your pants or belt just above your hip.

Only remove it if you're going to swim, bathe or shower. Take it off just before you go to bed.



Walking opportunities

Walking is the most natural form of physical activity and it can easily be incorporated into your daily routine or recreation activities with just a few simple lifestyle changes such as:

- get off the train or bus a stop earlier and walk
- walk to the corner shop or between shops
- take a walk at lunchtime
- take the dog for a walk – and the family!
- walk to your favourite local restaurant/café
- walk with your children to school
- play a round of golf (without the golf buggy)
- enjoy a family bushwalk.



Walking in your community!

Walking is a great way to spend time with your friends or get to know your local neighbourhood, whilst also improving your health.

Further related websites are:

- www.patf.dpc.wa.gov.au
- www.hearfoundation.com.au
- www.find30.com.au
- www.dpi.wa.gov.au/walking

Contact your Local Government to find out about walking groups or other physical activity opportunities and activities in your area.

And why not let family and friends try your pedometer – they may all want one!



Average steps for West Australians

A Western Australian survey, coordinated by the Physical Activity Taskforce, was conducted in November 2002 with more than 3000 adults to assess their level of physical activity. A unique feature of this survey was the use of a pedometer by 603 of the survey group which provided an objective measure of their levels of activity.

The survey results showed that walking for recreation is the most popular activity for men (55%) and women (70%).

The average number of steps taken each day for various groups is shown below:

Perth (9627 steps)

Non-Perth (9899 steps)

Males

Females

18–29 years old (9939 steps)

18–29 (9854 steps)

30–44 (11284 steps)

30–44 (9853 steps)

45–59 (10163 steps)

45–59 (9253 steps)

60+ (8601 steps)

60+ (7757 steps)

**A full copy of the report is available at
www.patf.dpc.wa.gov.au**

Reference: McCormack, G., Milligan, R., Giles-Corti, B., and Clarkson, J.P. (2003). *Physical Activity Levels of Western Australian Adults 2002: Results from the adult physical activity survey and pedometer study*. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government.



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