



A PRACTICAL GUIDE  
TO STARTING A WALKING GROUP

[www.doitwell.ca](http://www.doitwell.ca)  
(click on Hamilton Walks)



Hamilton

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- Chronic Disease Prevention Adult staff and students
- Falls and Injury Prevention (SAVIP) staff
- Chronic Disease Prevention Child/Youth staff

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- Centre Mall Walking Program
- Hamilton Spectator, Health & Wellness Committee
- North End Sunny Strollers
- Southwest Walking Group
- Strollerbabes
- Walmart – Ancaster Senior Centre Walking Group
- West Walkers Group

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## 1. Introduction

Hamilton Walks is a strategy designed to encourage local residents to make walking a part of their everyday lives. In addition to health benefits, walking is a way to share time with family and friends, and to protect the environment from the pollution created by cars. As more people choose to walk, there are more people visible on the street, and as a result our community is safer.

Walking groups are one way to get people to walk more regularly. This booklet is designed to help staff/leaders working with older adults, special populations, residents of Hamilton, and employees to create and support walking groups where people live, work, learn and play.



The West Walkers Group, Photo by Paul Hourigan,  
The Hamilton Spectator, Nov. 20, 2003.

## 2. Why Walk?

Many Hamilton residents are not active enough to maintain their health. Surveys show that 49% of Hamiltonians over the age of 12 are physically inactive<sup>1</sup>. Hamilton is experiencing increases in obesity, asthma, and falls and injury. These are warning signs that residents need to make changes in their lifestyles now!

Physical activity promotes overall health, weight control, healthy aging, and reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes as well as injuries from falls. To gain these benefits, a person should work up to 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity at a moderate pace most days of the week. Walking is ideal for people of all ages because it is:

- safe for most people
- easy on the joints
- convenient
- free except for the price of comfortable shoes
- and something almost everyone can do

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2005

## What are the Benefits of Walking?

### A. Health Benefits

In the short-term, walking:

- reduces stress
- increases energy levels
- allows for a better night's sleep
- improves mood

In the long-term, walking regularly:

- reduces aches and pains
- improves posture and balance
- builds stronger bones and muscles
- improves the health of the heart and lungs
- can help maintain a healthy weight when combined with healthy eating

Reduces risk of:

- type 2 diabetes
- heart disease and high blood pressure
- some cancers (for example, breast and colon)
- osteoporosis
- obesity
- falls and Injury
- depression

## B. Community Benefits

- Increasing the number of physically active Hamiltonians saves money. By increasing the number of Canadians who become active by 10%, the country will save about 5 billion dollars in health care costs<sup>2</sup>.
- More people walking means more eyes on the street and safer neighbourhoods.

## C. Environmental Benefits

- When more people choose to walk, there are fewer cars on the road and less air pollution.

## Why Walk in Groups?

Groups:

- make walking more enjoyable and motivating
- provide a chance to meet and talk with others
- make people feel safer when out walking, especially at night
- create opportunities to walk in new places
- help people 'stick to it'



Hamilton Beach Trail in Confederation Park

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/work/activity\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/work/activity_e.html)

## 3. How to Get Started.

### A. Get informed.

- Visit the Hamilton Walks website at [www.doitwell.ca](http://www.doitwell.ca) - click on Hamilton Walks or call the Nutrition and Physical Activity Advice line at 905-546-3630.
- Visit an existing walking group.
- Consider forming a local chapter of a walking organization (for example, Volkssport Ontario <http://www.ncf.carleton.ca/~ao877/> or Strollerbabes <http://home.cogeco.ca/~strollerbabes/>.)

### B. Find Others to Help Start a Walking Group.

- Invite others to help form a walking group at your workplace, at your community centre or in your neighbourhood.
- Hold a meeting in a public place such as a room at your workplace, community centre or library, or the local coffee shop.



Strollerbabes Walking Group Photo By Debra Downey  
Dundas Star News, March 26, 2004.

## 4. Walking Group Checklist

To help your group get started, consider:

### A. Goals of the Group.

- What do people want from this walking group?

### B. Structure of the Walking Group.

- Date, time and location of walks
  - Will you meet on the same day, at the same time every week throughout the year?
  - Will you always walk in the same place, or change routes regularly?
- How formal or informal will the group be?
  - Will you have refreshments or a meeting after walking?
  - Group Name?
  - Memberships?
    - Cost (keep cost low, or free)?
    - What information, if any, will be collected (name, telephone numbers, address, etc.)?
    - Will membership cards be given out?
    - Will members notify the group when they cannot attend?

- How far and how fast will the group walk?
- Under what conditions will the group not walk?
  - Ice on the sidewalks and roads?
  - Smog Alert Days?
  - Temperature extremes?

### C. Expectations for Walkers

- Use the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q & You) to ensure they are able to walk and that they follow-up with their health care professional as required. The PAR-Q is supported by Health Canada and can be downloaded from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/questionnaire.html>
- Walk at a pace within their ability. They should:
  - hear themselves breathing,
  - feel warm,
  - and be able to carry on a conversation
- Be Sun Sensible year round. They should:
  - wear a hat and sunglasses
  - apply sunscreen to exposed skin 20 minutes before going outside
  - check the daily UV Index forecast

For more information, visit [www.canadiancancersociety.ca](http://www.canadiancancersociety.ca) (link to 'publications' to 'sun publications') or [www.dermatology.ca](http://www.dermatology.ca) (link to 'patients & public' to 'sun awareness').

- Be prepared for hot weather
  - If the smog, humidity, or heat is too high, consider walking indoors at a mall.

Otherwise,

- Drink plenty of water.
- Wear loose, lightweight clothing.
- Consider a walk early in the morning or in the evening.

- Be prepared for cold weather.

- If it is too cold, snowy or icy outside, consider walking indoors at a mall.

Otherwise,

- Dress in layers.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Wear a hat, gloves or mittens; a scarf, neck gaiter, ski mask; waterproof shoes or boots.

For more information, visit

<http://walking.about.com/od/cold/a/coldwalking.htm>

- Use an insect repellent while walking outdoors. For more information, call 905-546-3575 or visit [www.hamilton.ca/westnile](http://www.hamilton.ca/westnile).
- Follow pedestrian safety rules.
  - Walk on the sidewalk whenever they are safely available, otherwise walk facing traffic as far to the left as possible.
  - Obey traffic signals.
  - Cross at intersections. At crosswalks where there is not a traffic light or officer, pedestrians have the right-of-way. Catch the driver's eye before crossing.

- If there are not any crosswalks, signs or signals, the pedestrian must yield the right-of-way to all vehicles.
- See and be seen. Wear light colours or reflective clothing , and look left, right, then left again before crossing the street.

For more information, visit

<http://www.ci.vancouver.wa.us/transportation/brochures/pedsafety/ped.html>

#### D. Expectations of the Walking Leaders

- Welcome new members.
- Ensure that walkers are aware of the expectations of the leader and walking members.
- Encourage a “buddy system” so that slower walkers, who fall behind the group, do not walk alone.
- Plan ahead, carry
  - a simple first aid kit
  - a cell phone
- Advertise the group and attract new members.
- Help maintain interest in the group (see page 14 &15).
- Be aware of other walking groups to help direct members who are better suited to another group.

**Remember:** group members' needs will change over time.

## 5. Set Walking Routes

For Local Maps Call or Visit:

Hamilton Conservation Authority 905-648-4427  
[www.conservationhamilton.ca](http://www.conservationhamilton.ca)

Municipal Service Centres 905-546-CITY (2489)  
<http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/cityandgovernment/cityservices/municipalservicecentres.htm>

Tourism Hamilton Information Centre 905-546-2666  
[www.tourismhamilton.com](http://www.tourismhamilton.com)

Explore Hamilton Trails – [www.hamilton.ca](http://www.hamilton.ca) (click on trails). For detailed trail information, visit <http://www.trailscanada.com/index.htm>

It is important for leaders to walk the route first. Look at the:

- amount of traffic,
- condition of the sidewalks and paths,
- how easy it is to cross the street,
- how long the walk takes,
- availability of washrooms,
- availability of free parking,
- accessibility of route for wheelchairs, walkers, and baby strollers,
- barriers that would be a problem for new walkers.

For “Walkability Checklists”, visit:

<http://www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf>

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/ped/walk1.html>

For Walk Route Planning, visit:

<http://www.whi.org.uk/uploads/documents/2335/Advice%20Note%20%20Route%20Planning%20for%20Health%20Walks.pdf>

## 6. Recruit Members

Once you have decided on the details of your walking group, it is time to find your members. Advertise at places where you want to find your members:

- **Workplace** – bulletin board, e-mails, or newsletters
- **Neighbourhood** – grocery store bulletin board, local newspaper, library, places of worship, or community recreation/seniors centre
- **Community Organization** – places of worship, support groups, weekly events, or bulletin boards

### Sample Poster Content

Title: Do You Enjoy Walking?

Are you looking for people to walk with?

Group Name: If yes, join the Sunshine Neighbourhood Walking Group

Day and Time: Tuesday evening walks at 6:30 p.m.

Location: Meet at the Grant Library at 480 Grant St W. front door

Cost: Free

Contact Information: For more information call Julie at 905 - \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Keep Walkers Motivated

### A. Hold Motivational Meetings.

Regular meetings can motivate group members:

- Invite a speaker to talk about physical activity, healthy eating, and other interesting topics.
- Find and share walking-related articles, tools or events.
- Share success stories.
- Recognize group members who have achieved their goals. They may have improved their health or lost weight or increased their number of steps taken per day.

### B. Participate in Community Walking Events.

- Consult local community calendars for special events such as Jingle Bell Walk, Ontario Hiking Week, Walk Across Canada, or Walktober.



Source: <http://10000steps.org.au/>

### C. Send Regular Updates.

- Let members know about walks and special events by e-mail, posters, mail, or telephone tree.

### D. Showcase Your Group.

- Call your local newspaper to highlight your group for free advertisement, promotion, and pride.

### E. Vary the Route or Structure.

- To challenge the group and prevent boredom, try changing the regular route.

### F. Use a Pedometer.

- A pedometer is a simple device used to measure the number of steps you take in a day. It has been shown to motivate people to walk more<sup>3</sup>.

For more information about pedometers see:

[www.ACTIVE2010.ca](http://www.ACTIVE2010.ca) - search 'pedometers'

<http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/category.cgi?c=3;s=p>

<http://www.doitwell.ca/pages/projects/Hamilton+Walks.html>



<sup>3</sup> <http://fitness.gov/pcpfdigestjune2002.pdf>

## 8. Monitor Your Group

### A. Check the Group's Walking Ability & Progress.

- When your group starts, determine its walking ability by timing your walk. Talk to the group members afterwards about how they thought it went. After a few months, do the same timed walk and see how much your group has improved.
  - Improvements are a big motivator, especially for beginners.
  - Keep a logbook of the progress. For a sample visit, <http://www.bcbs.com/innovations/walkingworks/walklog.pdf>

### B. Get Feedback from Group Members.

- It is important to talk to the group about what is working well, and what needs to be changed.
- Check with the group on a regular basis (monthly). Review motivational needs, goals, structure, and expectations. Prior to making any changes, consider whether the change will encourage or discourage current and/or new members.
- Discuss changes with the group to ensure that the needs of the members are met.

## 9. Additional Resources Available

### Canadian Websites

Canada On the Move: Step One! - [www.canadaonthemove.ca](http://www.canadaonthemove.ca)

*Canada's Physical Activity Guides* – Health Canada -  
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/fitness/downloads.html>

Chatelaine – On the Move Walking Clubs  
[www.chatelaine.com/walkingclub](http://www.chatelaine.com/walkingclub)

Hamilton Walks (walking groups, support material, and pedometers)  
[www.doitwell.ca](http://www.doitwell.ca) click on Hamilton Walks

Hearts in Motion Walking Club - Heart & Stroke Foundation  
[www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)

### International Websites

American On the Move: Simple steps to better health  
<http://aom.americaonthemove.org/site/c.krLXJ3PJKuG/b.1524889/k.BFFA/Home.htm>

“The How To” about walking - [www.walking.about.com](http://www.walking.about.com)

*Walk Your Way to Health Record Sheet*  
[www.lancaster.unl.edu/food/walk.pdf](http://www.lancaster.unl.edu/food/walk.pdf)

Walking the Way to health - [www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk)

Walk Texas - <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/diabetes/walktx.shtm>

Walking Works: The Blue Program for a Healthier America – Blue Cross Blue Shield – [www.bluecrossblueshield.com](http://www.bluecrossblueshield.com) (click on walking works)

**Printed information available from City of Hamilton Public Health Services** at 905-546-2424 x3521.

*Canada's Physical Activity Guides* (Adult, Older Adult, Youth and Children) from Health Canada

Guidelines for Walking Group Members and Walking Group Leaders (sample)

*Stretches: To Do Before and After Activity*

Walk this Way Kits – (A Guide to *Stick To It!* And a *Stick To It* laminated Calendar)

*Walking: The Activity of a Lifetime*

<http://www.lin.ca/resource/html/walkingbookENG.pdf>

Hamilton Walks into Spring Calendar

Hamilton Walks into Fall Calendar



South West Walking Group  
Photo by Sherly Nadler, The Hamilton Spectator, Aug. 6, 2003.