



walking works

How walking can help everyone lead
longer, healthier and happier lives



Walking works. It makes people happy, keeps everyone healthy and can even save your life.

That's the conclusion of an extensive new review, produced by the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support. You can read the highlights in this short summary.

We believe Walking for Health, England's largest network of health walk schemes, is the key to beating the physical inactivity epidemic that's responsible for thousands of illnesses and deaths every year and puts immense strain on the NHS.

The evidence also reveals that walking brings people together, helps them feel positive and is a cost-effective way to exercise too.

Problems like obesity can be complex, but we think the solution is simple. The research we've summarised in this guide proves it's all about putting one foot in front of the other.



A message from Kevin Fenton, Public Health England

Like many developed countries, England is experiencing a serious inactivity crisis, with life threatening consequences.

In 2011 the four UK Chief Medical Officers released new recommendations that made it easier for people to be classed as active. Despite this, four out of ten men and five out of ten women are still not active enough to benefit their health. This increases the risk of serious illnesses like type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers, and makes it more likely that people will be overweight or obese. In England 61% of adults and 30% of children between 2 and 15 are classed as overweight or obese. The associated health problems of this inactivity are costing the economy up to £10 billion a year.

The Walking Works report by the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support examines the impact of inactivity on people's health and wellbeing and shows how supporting people to get active through walking can be a major part of the solution to our current crisis.

It makes the case that Walking for Health, England's largest network of health walks, is the type of community-focused, supportive, engaging, affordable and inclusive programme that can accomplish the change we need to see and meets the needs of local people. It also shows that not only does walking combat serious health issues, but it improves mental health and makes people happier. Bringing together existing research, facts and figures, the review clearly lays out the problems we are facing and the manifold benefits of walking and Walking for Health. It shows that walking works.

Reading it brings us closer to understanding the kind of societal shift that needs to happen before we truly combat the pandemic of inactivity. The figures are alarming and show that we need to take action now.

The good news is that there are steps we can take to help people get more active: life-changing steps.

I urge you all to read this summary of Walking Works, digest the information, get walking, and encourage and help others to do the same.

Kevin Fenton
Director, Health and Wellbeing
Public Health England

“Reading this brings us closer to understanding the kind of societal shift that needs to happen before we truly combat the pandemic of inactivity.”

Staying still can kill

Are you sitting a bit too comfortably? The facts show that physical inactivity now rivals smoking as one of the nation's biggest health problems.

Today it's responsible for 17% of early deaths in the UK.¹

In fact, what we're looking at is an international epidemic. Physical inactivity causes 6% of deaths around the world, making it one of the top four global killers.²

Physical inactivity is the principle cause of a huge number of common health conditions including:

- 10% of heart disease cases
- 13% of type 2 diabetes cases
- 18% of colon cancer cases
- 17% of breast cancer cases.³

But that's not all. Research reveals that being inactive:

- increases your chances of developing cancer, heart disease or having a stroke by 25-30%
- can take three to five years off your life.⁴

Being inactive puts a strain on the economy as well as health. Experts estimate it could be costing us up to £10 billion a year through sick days, health care costs and early deaths.^{5, 6}

Getting active saves lives

We know that physical inactivity causes heart disease, breast cancer and even early death. We also know that many of these problems could be prevented if everyone began to move more.

The UK Chief Medical Officers say that adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity, like walking, every week. Kids should be active for an hour every day.⁷

But in England some studies have suggested that only 6% of men and 4% of women actually achieve this.⁸ One in three people don't even manage 30 minutes a week.^{9, 10}

The simple fact is that getting active can save your life.

We could prevent 37,000 deaths every year, just by taking a walk.¹¹

Being active also slashes the risk of getting these serious diseases by 20-50%:

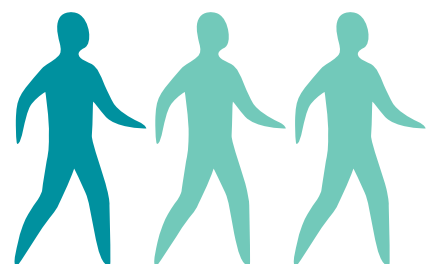
- heart disease
- stroke
- type 2 diabetes
- colon and breast cancer
- Alzheimer's disease.^{12, 13, 14}

Being
inactive can
take **three**
to five years
off your life.

“Physical inactivity
has an impact on
health comparable
to that of smoking.”

*I-Min Lee,
epidemiologist*

Less than 30 minutes activity a week



One in three adults in England
don't manage 30 minutes of
physical activity per week

If everyone in England was active enough it could prevent:

36,815

people dying prematurely

12,061

people going to hospital for emergency coronary heart disease treatment

6,735

cases of breast cancer

4,719

cases of colorectal cancer

294,730

cases of diabetes.

“If a medication existed which had a similar effect to physical activity, it would be regarded as a wonder drug or a miracle cure.”

Sir Liam Donaldson,
The former Chief
Medical Officer
of England

And the benefits don't end there. Being active:

- helps you stay a healthy weight
- increases 'good' cholesterol
- reduces blood pressure
- builds healthy muscles and bones
- improves balance
- reduces the risk of falls.

If everyone in England got the message about being active it could prevent:

- 36,815 people dying prematurely
- 12,061 people going to hospital for emergency coronary heart disease treatment
- 6,735 cases of breast cancer
- 4,719 cases of colorectal cancer
- 294,730 cases of diabetes.¹⁵

Condition	Risk reduction	Strength of evidence
Death	20-35%	Strong
Coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke	20-35%	Strong
Type 2 diabetes	35-50%	Strong
Colon cancer	30-50%	Strong
Breast cancer	20%	Strong
Hip fracture	36-68%	Moderate
Depression	20-30%	Strong
Alzheimer's disease	40-45%	Moderate

16, 17, 18, 19

Happy and healthy

Keeping active helps us feel both healthy and happy.

People that stay active:

- get less stressed
- sleep better
- feel better
- have a 30% lower risk of getting depressed
- keep their minds sharp
- improve their memories
- reduce their risk of having dementia.^{20,21,22,23,24,25,26}

Why walking works

Walking is already one of most popular physical activities in the world. It's open to nearly everyone – only 4% of us need help to walk outside our homes or can't do it at all.²⁷

For most of us walking is as simple as slipping on a pair of shoes and opening the front door. It's perfect for people who have poor health, or don't fancy intense exercise.

There are lots of reasons why walking is so accessible:

- walking is free – you don't need expensive gym membership or special shoes to take part
- you can wear everyday clothes so you won't feel you stand out on the street
- walking is gentle, so you're unlikely to get injured
- it's fun to get together with friends and go for a walk
- it's a healthy way of getting where you need to be
- you can do it almost anywhere at any time
- you can start off slowly and build up gradually as you get more confident.

Walking makes a great 'gateway' to the world of exercise because it often inspires people to try out other healthy activities.

Walking is amazing exercise

Walking may be straightforward, but it's also effective. The Chief Medical Officers agree that walking counts towards those all-important 150 minutes of moderate physical activity everyone should be doing.

That means that walking can help people realise all the benefits of physical activity that we've already touched on.

Connecting communities

Aside from boosting your health, walking has positive benefits for the whole community too.

By leaving the car at home you're helping to reduce pollution, end traffic jams and fight climate change.

Taking a walk means you see more of your friends and neighbours out on the street. Studies show that this can help everyone feel part of the community and actively reduces crime.²⁸

Is it any surprise that walking is the most popular way of getting around in Great Britain? Remember that in 2011 only 3% of trips were by bicycle while 23% were on foot.²⁹

“Walking is the nearest activity to perfect exercise.”

Professors

Jerry Morris and

Adrienne Hardman

Number of people involved in physical activities



9.1 million adults in England walk recreationally for at least 30 minutes once a month. This is almost twice the number that swim, more than twice the number that go to the gym, and nearly three times the number that cycle.

“As a GP running a diabetic clinic without any access to physical activity options for the patients, I felt I was failing them. That’s why I started Walking for Health, to provide a local, low cost, fun, social method of becoming active that other GPs can also benefit from signposting to their patients.”

Dr William Bird MBE, founder of Walking for Health



Bryony's story



I joined Walking for Health in November 2012 to build up my fitness and improve my health following surgery to remove a tumour. I'd been allowed to do some restrictive exercise by my consultant before this, but nothing strenuous.

Following my surgery I wasn't able to walk far, due to being immobile for two weeks in hospital.

A physiotherapist helped me walk slowly down a corridor at first, which was very hard going. I decided to take it slowly and do short walks with the aid of a hiking stick so I didn't fall over, and could prop myself up for a rest.

I found out about Walking for Health through a friend who recommended it. I searched online and found there were two very local walks for me, so I joined a group the following day.

My first Walking for Health walk was really good. I was able to meet lots of people and found the walk easy going and not too hard for my health.

I noticed each time I went out for the walks I felt stronger and stronger. After a few weeks I was able to get up the hill quicker, without the aid of a hiking stick, and my breathing was better.

Being out in the green spaces was really nice and it was also great socially, as after the walks we finished up at a café for refreshments. I'm pleased I've met so many different people and made such good friends.

*Six months on my fitness and health has really improved. I've also been out walking in the Yorkshire moors and on the coast in Whitby with friends. **Walking has been very important to my recovery – it's helped me boost my energy levels, wellbeing and confidence.***

Bryony Booth, 32
from Hull, East Yorkshire

“My first Walking for Health walk was really good. I met lots of people and found the walk easy going and not too hard for my health.”

Bryony Booth,
Walking for Health participant

Walking for Health is the answer

Together, the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support run Walking for Health, supporting 600 local schemes across England to organise short, free walks led by friendly, trained walk leaders.

For the last 13 years we've made it our mission to help everyone – including those affected by cancer – discover just how good walking makes you feel.

Our walks are organised by everyone from local councils and NHS trusts to volunteer groups.

More than 70,000 people walk with us regularly at 3,400 weekly walks led by 10,000 volunteers.³⁰

Walking for Health in numbers

70,000
10,000

Walking for Health has over
70,000 regular walkers and
10,000 volunteers

Walking for Health gets great results. Getting involved:

- **Inspires people who don't exercise to move more.** Almost half of our walkers used to do less than half an hour of activity three days a week until they started walking.³¹
- **Has staying power.** People that walk with us take at least five walks every four months.³²
- **Helps people stay active.** Not everyone can exercise as much as they used to. Walking lets everyone step down without giving up exercise altogether.^{33, 34}
- **Is popular with women and the over-55s.** Nearly three-quarters (72%) of our walkers are over 55, the same amount are women. Both these groups usually have lower than average levels of physical activity.³⁵
- **Is highly cost effective** – particularly when compared to the costs of treating diseases caused by inactivity.³⁶

Bringing people together

Walking for Health is about more than just improving people's health – getting involved improves their lives too.

We've seen how Walking for Health brings people together to make new friends. In fact, meeting new friends is a big reason for taking part and helps make everyone feel good and stay positive.

Many people say that not having a friend to exercise with is a major barrier to staying active. Walking for Health offers a great way to meet a whole group of people who've made a commitment to changing their lives for the better.³⁷

Further enquiries

For more information or a copy of the full *Walking Works* report, please contact the Walking for Health team on **walkingforhealth@ramblers.org.uk** or call **020 7339 8541**. Connect with us on Twitter **@healthywalks** and Facebook **facebook.com/healthywalks**.

“We would be out in the countryside come rain or shine. It was great to be doing something active while making new friends.”

Allison Gordon,
Walking for Health
participant



Appendix

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Together the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support run Walking for Health, helping you get and stay active.

The Ramblers is the charity for walkers, helping everyone to enjoy the outdoors on foot, while Macmillan strongly believes in the health benefits of exercise for people living with or beyond cancer.

By sharing our expertise, we support 600 local schemes across England to offer short, free walks. Our aim is to help more people – including those affected by cancer – discover the joys and health benefits of walking.

*For more details and to find
your local scheme visit*
www.walkingforhealth.org.uk



Supporting you to
get active and stay active

Macmillan Cancer Support is a registered charity (England and Wales no. 261017, Scotland no. SC039907, Isle of Man no. 604) and a company limited by guarantee (England and Wales no. 2400969, Isle of Man no. 4694F).

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