

Five Walking Warm-up Moves

The higher intensity the exercise you intend to do, the more you benefit from warm-up exercises. But even a relaxing stroll is likely to feel better after two to four minutes of gentle, dynamic warm-up moves. Keep in mind that gradually increasing blood flow and slowly increasing your muscle and joint temperature can improve your comfort and performance, and reduce the risk of injury during any exercise. You'll feel better, and walk better.

I recommend the following five simple moves before any brisk walk, as they target some muscles that do lots of the work in walking. All are done standing up, and the movements are slow, controlled, and comfortable. If you spend 30 seconds on each the whole routine takes under three minutes. (Rest one hand on something for balance when needed.)

1. **Ankle circles.** Stand on one foot and lift the other off the ground. Slowly flex that ankle through its full range of motion, making large circles with the toes, but only by moving the ankle joint, not the lower leg. Do 6 to 8 in each direction, then switch feet and repeat.
2. **Leg swings.** Stand on one leg, and swing the other loosely from the hip, front to back. It should be a relaxed, unforced motion like the swinging of a pendulum, and your foot should swing no higher than a foot or so off the ground. Do 15 to 20 swings on each leg.
3. **Pelvic Loops.** Put your hands on your hips with your knees "soft" (slightly bent) and feet shoulder width apart. Keep your body upright and make 10 slow continuous circles with your hips, pushing them gently forward, to the left, back and to the right. Then reverse directions and repeat.
4. **Arm Circles.** Hold both arms straight out to the sides, making yourself a letter "T." Make 10 to 12 slow backward circles with your hands, starting small and finishing with large circles, using your entire arm. Shake your arms out, then repeat with 10 to 12 forward circles again starting small and getting larger.
5. **Hula hoop jumps.** Begin jumping in place on both feet. Keep your head and shoulders facing forward, and twist your feet and lower body left then right, back and forth, on successive jumps. Jump 15 to 20 times, facing forward but twisting the hips and legs left and right on alternate jumps.

Bonus: Up, side, back, downs. Ideal if you ever suffer shin soreness while walking. Stand with feet hip width apart and roll your feet through four positions, holding each for a two-count.

- Up. Stand on your toes, heels as high as possible.
- Side. Roll to the outside edges of your feet, with the inside edges pulled up.
- Back. Stand on your heels, with your toes held as high as possible.
- Down. Rest, with both feet flat on the ground.

Four Tips for Faster Walking Technique.

To boost your walking to a speed that's sure to build fitness and burn calories, you don't have to be a racewalker. Just try these four simple tips to pick it up to a healthy pace.

- **Stand tall.** No slouch in the shoulders, forward lean from the waist, or excess sway in your back. **CUE:** Keep your eyes on the horizon, don't let your chin drop.
- **Focus on quicker, not longer steps.** Yes, your stride gets longer as you walk faster. But that shouldn't be your goal; let it happen naturally. Instead concentrate on taking faster steps. **CUE:** Count how many steps you take in 20 seconds; shoot for over 45 (that's 135 steps/minute, or roughly 3.5 to 4 miles per hour).
- **Bend your arms.** Hold your elbows at a right angle so your arms can swing more quickly; target a quick, compact arm swing. **CUE:** Hands should trace an arc from alongside the waistband on the back swing, to chest height (no higher) in the front.
- **Push off of your toes.** Consciously push off of your toes and generate as much boost as possible at the end of each step. **CUE:** Feel like you're showing someone behind you the bottom of your shoe on every stride.

The Three-Minute After-Activity Stretch Routine.

There's no need to be super flexible. But it is worth doing just a few minutes of stretching after each walk, when your muscles are the most warm and compliant. That's enough to help maintain your mobility and a healthy range of movement for a lifetime of active living. It's also likely to reduce the chance of injuries or limitations. Here are three simple, stand up stretches you can do any place anytime after exercise.

Do all of these stretches slowly, never to the point of discomfort; hold each stretch for six to eight slow, deep breaths. Imagine releasing muscle tension with each deep exhale. Begin each stretch standing up, and feel free to rest one hand on something for balance if necessary. If you have time, go through the cycle twice.

1. **Calf and hip stretch.** Take a giant step forward with your left foot. Bend your left knee (but don't push it beyond your foot) and keep your right heel on the ground and your right leg straight behind you. Keep your abdominal muscles gently contracted so there's no excess arch in your back, and you should feel the stretch in both your right calf *and* hip. Hold for several deep breaths. Then switch legs and repeat.
2. **Back and hamstring stretch.** Stand with your feet together and your knees soft (not straightened). Lean forward from the waist and let your arms and head hang loosely toward the ground. Don't necessarily try to touch your toes—just let your body hang under its own weight, and let it ease into the stretch with each deep exhale. *Slowly* stand up (to avoid light-headedness) and repeat.
3. **Shin and thigh stretch.** Grasp your right toes with your right hand, and gently pull your foot up behind you; keep your right knee pointed toward ground. Your heel does not have to reach your buttocks—just pull to the point of feeling a gentle stretch in the thigh, hip, and shin. Hold for several deep breaths. Switch legs, repeat.

Adapted from: *The Complete Guide to Walking for Health, Weight Loss, and Fitness* by Mark Fenton (Lyons Press, 2008). © 2000, R. Mark Fenton

For many more practical tips like these, check out “The Complete Guide to Walking for Health, Weight Loss, and Fitness.” (Lyons press, 2008)