

# Walk your way to good health

Walking is one of the most popular ways to get fit. It's one of the safest, simplest, and least expensive options to increase your physical activity level and improve your overall health; however, even this simple exercise can be more effective when proper technique is used. To help you get the most out of your walking program, Independent Health encourages you to use the following tips.

## Proper Walking Techniques

- **Head up:** Avoid looking at the ground. Keeping your head down can strain your back, neck and shoulders. Instead, keep your head up (chin parallel to the ground) and eyes forward. Enjoy the scenery around you!
- **Posture perfect:** Stand up straight with your stomach pulled in and your shoulders down, back and relaxed. Good posture for walking allows you to breathe well.
- **Up in arms:** Let your arms swing naturally at your sides as you walk. Good arm motion can help you breath better and keep you from tiring.
- **Stride right:** Fall into a natural stride that feels comfortable to your body.

## Build Your Own Walking Program

- **For general health benefits:** Walk 30 minutes a day, most days of the week, at a "talking" pace (i.e., enough to elevate breathing, but still carry a conversation).
- **To improve cardiovascular fitness:** Walk three to four days a week, 20 to 30 minutes, at a very fast pace (i.e., breathing hard, but not gasping for air).
- **For weight loss:** Walk a minimum of five days a week, 45 to 60 minutes, at a brisk pace.

### Benefits of Walking

- Increases energy levels
- Weight loss and management
- Tighten and firm muscles
- Strengthens bones
- Improves circulation
- Reduces stress
- Reduces blood pressure
- Increase "good" cholesterol (HDL) levels

### Places to Walk

- Neighborhood sidewalks or well-lit areas
- Parks
- Walking trails
- Outdoor tracks
- Recreational facilities
- Malls
- Around the office

If you're new to walking, start off with slow, short sessions and build your way up gradually. If you have any health concerns or medical conditions, be sure to check with your doctor for advice before you begin a routine.