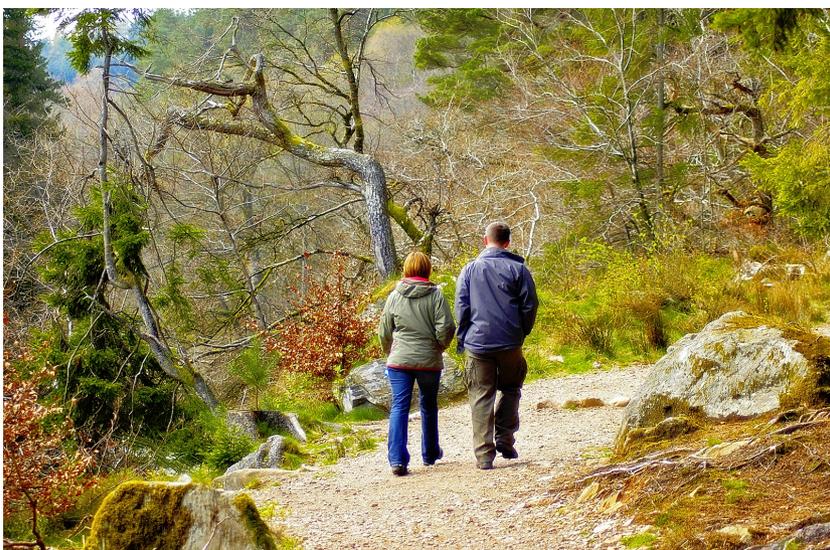


Walking - Enjoy but don't strain or sprain

Physical Therapy in Merced & Atwater for Common Injuries when walking

Although not generally considered a 'strenuous' form of exercise, fitness walking should still be considered formidable! Walking at any pace provides great rewards for your health including benefits for your joints and muscles, as well as your heart, lungs, bowels, and brain. Even walking at a strolling pace can benefit the body, but by increasing your pace to a level where you get your heart rate up you can truly give your body a good workout. Once you start increasing your pace and using your walk as a form of fitness, there are a number of things you should keep in mind in order to walk efficiently, and to avoid injury.



Most people think of walking as being done only by the legs, but your arms play a very important part in your fitness walking technique. Moving your arms deliberately as you walk will get your upper body involved in the activity and increase your heart rate quicker. Your elbows should be bent to nearly a right angle and this angle should be roughly maintained as your arms move forward and back. A common mistake is to bend and straighten the elbows as you move your arms; this motion puts significant stress on your shoulder joints and can quickly cause shoulder pain and injury. Your arms should move alongside of your body in a forward and backward motion; be careful not to swing your arms across your body as this decreases the efficiency of the arm swing and works against the energy that propels your body forward. Don't swing your upper arm up higher than the nipple line. Keep in mind that your legs move at the same rhythm of your arms, so by increasing your arm's swing movements, it will also increase the movement of your legs. This is an easy way to increase both your speed and the distance you can cover in the time you have; keep your arms going!

Keep your hands relaxed and slightly cupped. If you are using walking poles (see Guide for Selecting Walking Equipment) then keep a firm but not tensed grip on the pole handles. In addition to keeping your hands relaxed, work to keep your shoulders from rising up towards your ears. Rather, keep your shoulders back and in a slightly downward position while keeping your chest up. Ensure you also keep your head up and look where you are going; aim to look approximately 10-15 stride lengths ahead of you.

As you step, place your foot lightly down (rather than slapping it down) and ensure your foot touches down with a heel-then-toe fashion. Although taking large steps makes it seem like you are covering more ground,

large steps also make it difficult to keep the body moving forward as the energy of the step gets absorbed by the ground. Take small to medium steps and lean slightly forward in order to encourage the continuation of the forward motion while using the least amount of energy to do so. This will increase your walking cadence. As your foot plants on the ground, consciously tighten the buttocks muscle on that side. As you roll off your foot, consciously push off with your toes in order to propel your body forward. As often as possible, keep some tension in your core by gently drawing your belly button in towards your spine.

Walking uphill can increase the intensity of your workout. When walking uphill, ensure to shorten your stride and lean slightly forward; take a lot of tiny steps to propel up the hill rather than fewer large steps. In order to assist you in propelling yourself up the gradient, ensure you don't remain only on your toes; fully plant your foot up the gradient then straighten your knee. This technique uses your strong thigh and buttocks muscles to propel your body up the hill. Be sure to take care on the downward descent; many injuries are initiated due to the strain of coming down a gradient. The force exerted through your joints and muscles is much greater when you descend than when you ascend a gradient. If you have poles, be sure to use them as you descend in particular (in addition to when you ascend) in order to absorb some of the force as well as to maintain your balance and avoid a fall.

Lastly, stay hydrated. Remember that walking is still exercise and it depletes your fluid stores. The amount you need to drink really depends on how vigorous your walking effort is. Generally, you should try to drink a glass of water before heading out, then the equivalent of a glass for every 20-30 minutes of moderately vigorous walking. You need to drink more if you are working up a significant sweat or the weather is hot. If you start to feel thirsty then you have waited too long to drink! The thirst mechanism in the body only kicks in once your hydration levels are already low so don't determine your fluid intake only by your thirst levels.

Even though walking may not be the most aggressive activity out there, injuries can and do still occur. The most common injuries that occur with walking are:

- [Ankle Sprains](#)
- [Shin Splints](#)
- [Patellofemoral pain syndrome](#)
- [Iliotibial band syndrome](#)
- [Low Back Pain](#)
- [Interdigital Neurom \(Morton's Neuroma\)](#)
- [Achilles Tendonopathy](#)
- [Plantar Fasciitis](#)
- [Patellar Tendonopathy](#)
- Stress Fracture

Click on a link below to learn more:

- [Be Sure to Stretch](#)
- [Wear the correct shoes and clothing](#)