



# Walking for fitness

**T**he decision to take up exercise may be one of the most important decisions you will ever make. You will achieve greater fitness and well-being and you will find that you gain numerous health benefits including a reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. Regular physical activity also helps prevent obesity which is one of the major health risks facing Australians today.

Unlike many other forms of exercise, walking is an activity that almost anyone can do

at any stage of their life. However, if you have a medical condition and are unsure whether you should be walking, you should consult your doctor.

In a study reported in 2001 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* the effects of exercise on a group of 2000 people with chronic conditions including high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and high cholesterol, it was found that those who had done 30 minutes of gentle exercise each day were half as likely to die as those who did no activity each week.

If you are ready to start a walking program it is important to consider the type of equipment that you will need. A good place to start looking is the outdoor equipment shop and you may also find some handy information on the internet.

You should make sure your shoes fit you well. When selecting shoes you

should choose for comfort rather than style. Your feet can also swell after walking for an hour so you should buy your shoes late in the day when your feet will have been used for a while. Natural materials, such as leather, are kinder to feet than synthetic materials. Rubber soles are also good as they protect the feet from jarring and provide a good grip when the ground is wet and slippery.

It is best not to use your joggers or usual running shoes for walking. Walking shoes are excellent when the ground is flat and smooth such as when walking on paths. However, for walking on trails you will need trail running shoes as they are hard-wearing. Walking boots provide sturdy support for all types of tough terrain.

It is also important to consider what sort of jacket you should buy. An ideal jacket for comfort in all seasons is a

waterproof outer jacket and inner fleece. You should also have a wide-brimmed hat which will give good protection.

Walkers should carry at least 2 litres/person/day of water in cool weather and more in weather above 20 degrees C in strong, lightweight containers and nourishing food for both meals and snacks.

A pedometer can be attached to your belt and can keep track of your progress by measuring the number of steps you take in a day. You should aim to achieve 10,000 steps. The benefits of this amount of walking include ongoing weight management, lower blood pressure, improved glucose tolerance and increased cardiovascular health.

One way of adding interest to your walks is with audio guided walking tours on CD (or cassette). They have just arrived on the market, for those who like to explore cities at their own walking pace. They are already being enjoyed by visitors and Sydneysiders alike, who like to walk and explore Sydney. There are tales of convicts, early settlers, the military and ghosts of the past. A choice of four tours is available, covering different areas of central Sydney, yet they also make excellent listening and can be enjoyed without following the tour.

**If you would like more information on Talking of Sydney Tours look at the web site [www.talkingofsydney.com.au](http://www.talkingofsydney.com.au) and listen to the sample audio clips [www.talkingofsydney.com.au/audioclips.html](http://www.talkingofsydney.com.au/audioclips.html). For Heartwise Journal readers there is a 15 per cent discount for online or telephone orders direct. Ph 9404 1771**