

Charting Your Course to a Healthier Lifestyle, Step by Step

Using a pedometer (step counter) to tally your daily activity levels is a great way to become more active all day long. You will be pleasantly surprised at how motivating it can be to check your steps during the day. It's like have a personal coach following you around!

There are two goals involved in counting daily steps: increasing your daily activity throughout the day, plus spending some time walking aerobically (briskly enough to elevate your heart rate and improve your fitness level but moderate enough that you can carry on a conversation without gasping).

Getting Started

The first week, you need to find your baseline: how active you are right now. Clip your pedometer on your waistband, belt or pocket first thing in the morning and keep it on all day. Just before bed, right down how many steps you walked. Then reset to zero. Do this every day for a week. Then total up your steps, divide by 7 and you have your average daily step count.

Notice whether or not some days are more active for you than others. For instance, you may be more active during work days and sedentary on the weekends, or vice versa. As you set your goals for the week, realize that your average daily steps are based on a week's worth of statistics, not just a day, so your steps may still vary from day to day.

In general, you want to increase your average daily steps gradually. How gradually depends on you and your health and fitness level. Adding about 500 steps a day is a good goal for a beginner. If you're healthy and active, you may want to add 1000 steps. Adding steps means that each day that week you try to walk 500 steps more than your daily average from the previous week. You can walk more, of course, but be careful not to overdo. It's best to progress slowly and surely!

When you're comfortable with your added steps, set a new goal. Your long term goal is a minimum of 30 minutes of aerobic steps, plus as many lifestyle steps as you feel comfortable with. Some people have set the bar at 10,000 steps, which is about 5 miles of walking a day. But it's really an individual matter based on many factors of health, fitness, age etc. The main thing is, get those 30 minutes of moderately brisk walking the Surgeon General of the U.S. recommends for health, but then don't just sit the rest of the day!

Find ways to take more steps throughout the day to keep your blood flowing; you'll burn more calories, be more alert, and have more energy all day long.

Creative Stepping

Make a list of the ways you can get more steps in your day. Here are just a few ideas:

- Walk errands at work or at home
- Walk your child to school
- Use stairs instead of elevators or escalators
- Plan walking meetings or "walk breaks" instead of coffee breaks
- Dance or walk in place during commercial breaks or while on your cell phone
- Be inefficient in your house work. Fold laundry and walk it upstairs in small piles.
- Walk your dog instead of just letting her out the door
- Park at the perimeter of the parking lot
- Take a brisk walk around the mall or grocery store before you start shopping
- Watch your child's or grandchild's game as you walk around the field.

Quick Tip!

A common problem is forgetting about your pedometer when going to the bathroom – and letting it fall in!

