Take walks to the next level

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The benefits of walking are long and the learning curve short, which makes it the perfect option for anyone who wants to burn extra calories, improve heart health, keep bones strong and de-stress.

But there's more to walking than just putting one foot in front of the other, especially if you want to maximize its fitness and health benefits. To get the most out of your walk, you need to pick up the pace from a stroll to a speed that boosts your heart rate and respiration. Or, for a more exact measure of how hard you should be working, aim to take 100 steps a minute, which is a pace equivalent to moderate-intensity exercise. As for other ways to take your walking workout to the next level, here are 10 tips to try out this spring:

Shorten your stride

Ask individuals to pick up their walking pace and chances are they'll lengthen their stride. But over-striding results in a bobbing, inefficient style that causes premature fatigue. Shorten your stride until your weight is centred under your hips and your stride feels smooth and fluid. Your head should float along in a straight line with very little extraneous movement.

Perfect your plant

The foot plant starts with the heel and finishes with a powerful push off the ball of the foot. Make sure the roll from back to front of the foot is smooth — don't slap the forefoot into the pavement.

Tighten your arm swing

As your pace picks up, the arms bend and swing naturally by your side. Keep the arms close to the body as they swing forward and backward, initiating the movement from the shoulders, not the elbows. Avoid swinging the arms side to side. The hands should swing no further backward than your back pocket and no higher forward than your nipple.

Shore up your posture

Look at the road ahead, not at your feet, stacking your ears over your shoulders and lowering your chin. Depress your shoulders, sliding your shoulder blades down and toward your spine, and pull in your abs while tucking your tailbone under your hips.

Lean into in

As your pace picks up, lean slightly forward from the ankles, not the waist. You should feel like you're falling forward into each step while still maintaining good postural alignment from feet to forehead.

Experiment with intervals

Changing up the pace not only burns more calories, it also keeps your walking workouts fresh. Warm up for five minutes at a comfortable speed then alternate between a pace that pushes your effort to just short of uncomfortable to one that you can maintain easily. The quicker-paced intervals should last anywhere from 30 to 60 seconds, with recovery lasting two to three times longer than the speed interval.

Wear the right shoes

While walkers can wear shoes built for runners, most high-end running shoes have more performance-enhancing features than the average walker needs. Keep the specific needs of walking in mind when choosing a pair of shoes, including a light, breathable design with plenty of flex in the toe box to accommodate the aggressive push off the ball of the foot. No need to invest in the extra cushioning and elevated heel found in most running shoes.

Find the right speed

How fast should you walk? That's up to you, but it's nice to have a goal pace to strive toward.

Comfortable pace: 12 minutes per kilometre (five km per hour).

Moderate pace: Nine minutes per km (6.4 km/h).

Speedy pace: 7.5 minutes per km (nine km/h).

Keep stats

A smartphone and fitness app are two of a walker's best friends. The winning combination not only keeps you on pace with real-time feedback on speed and distance, it collects all your data so that you can track progress and your all-time stats.

Find a buddy

Having a walking partner instantly turns a workout into the best part of your day. He/she can also help push you when you need pushing and take you down a peg when you need to chill out. Best of all, a walking buddy is motivation for those days when the couch is calling louder than the need to work up a sweat.