



HARLEY STREET AT HOME
MENOPAUSE

Walk Your Way to
10,000 Steps

Welcome to your guide

Hello... and well done for taking the first step towards your Back To Basics fitness!

Maybe you've been thinking of starting to walk for exercise for a while. Maybe you've heard that it could help your peri/menopausal symptoms (tick!). Maybe you've tried walking in lockdown but gave up once the world (kind of) returned to normal and other commitments got in your way?

Fear of being seen keeps a lot of people from starting (or continuing) an exercise habit and enjoying the benefits it can bring. But not only is exercising vital for health reasons during this period of your life but setting new goals can help you to feel more organised and in control of one part of your life when everything else may seem up in the air.

Like anything new, the first time you do it is likely to be the hardest. After you've done it a few times, you'll feel more confident, comfortable, and be less concerned about others watching you. But hopefully this guide will help give you a pep talk... and remember, if you have any questions, you can contact me - Gail - in the Facebook group.

Good luck! And above all, be proud that you're doing something for you that's good for your physical and mental wellbeing.

Get the basics right

Most of us likely don't give much thought to how we walk or whether we are walking correctly.

But knowing how to walk with the right technique and good posture can help:

- keep your bones and joints aligned properly
- decrease wear and tear on your joints, muscles, and ligaments
- prevent back, hip, neck, and leg pain
- reduce muscle aches and fatigue
- reduce the risk of injuries
- improve your balance and stability

Walking with the right technique and posture isn't difficult. But it does involve being mindful of how you move.

To fully understand how to walk correctly, it helps to focus on each part of the body, from head to toe.

When you're walking, focus on standing tall with your chin parallel to the ground and your ears aligned above your shoulders. Imagine your head being pulled up gently by an invisible piece of string that's attached to the ceiling. This may help prevent you from dropping your head into your chest while you walk.

Keep your eyes and gaze forward. Focus on an area about 10 to 20 feet ahead of you while you walk and focus on elongating your spine while you walk. Try to avoid slouching, hunching, or leaning forward, which can put stress on your back muscles.

Try to keep your shoulders loose and relaxed, not tensed up toward your ears or slouched forward. You can do shoulder shrugs occasionally while you're walking to ensure that you're keeping your shoulders relaxed and in the right position.

As you take each step, focus on tightening and engaging your core muscles by pulling your belly button in toward your spine. This can help you maintain balance and stability. It can also relieve stress and pressure on your back as you walk.

As you walk, gently swing your arms back and forth at your sides. Make sure you swing your arms from your shoulders, not from your elbows. Don't swing your arms across your body and don't swing your arms up too high. Keep them around your midsection, not around your chest.

And finally, maintain a steady heel-to-toe gait. This involves striking the ground with your heel first, then rolling through your heel to your toe, and pushing out of the step with your toe. Avoid flat-footed steps or striking the ground with your toes first.

What are the benefits of walking correctly?

There are numerous physical and mental benefits of proper posture and good walking technique.

These include:

- Pain-free muscles and joints. Walking properly can help you avoid putting unnecessary stress and strain on the muscles, ligaments, and joints throughout your body.
- More energy. Walking with poor posture isn't efficient. It can wear your muscles out faster, whereas walking with good form can conserve your energy.
- Better lung health. Walking tall with your shoulders back allows your lungs to expand fully, making breathing easier and more efficient.
- Improved circulation. When your body is properly aligned and moving correctly, it makes it easier for your blood to circulate to all parts of your body.
- Improved digestion. Your body is better able to digest your food when your internal organs aren't compressed and there's healthy blood flow to your digestive tract.
- Greater core strength. Your abdominal muscles benefit from walking tall and being properly engaged.
- Fewer tension headaches. If you walk with your head held up, not bending forward, it can help reduce neck strain, which may lead to fewer tension headaches.
- Better balance. When you walk properly with the correct posture, it may help improve your balance and make you less prone to falling.

What equipment do I need?

Walking is a great way to exercise as there are only a few things you really need.

Start with a breathable, sweat-wicking shirt as your base layer, made of a technical fabric (such as CoolMax) rather than cotton. Depending on the weather, wear or carry a windproof, water-resistant jacket. And if it is cold, add an insulating layer of polyester microfleece or wool.

You can wear running shoes to walk if you choose. Many walkers choose this option because there tend to be more options, and they are lighter and more flexible than many walking shoes. But do invest in a good pair. Walking in old, broken-down, non-supportive trainers or inflexible boat shoes is a set-up for injury.

Along with the right shoes, you need good socks. Cotton holds moisture next to your skin and increases the risk of forming blisters. Instead, wear socks made from sweat-wicking fabric such as CoolMax, polypropylene, or wool.

Building your confidence and starting a routine

Menopause can play havoc with your body...and your self-esteem. Luckily, exercise can be a great confidence booster, and I think this is especially the case if you are a beginner.

The important thing to remember is to start slow and not overdo it. Your body needs time to adjust. With that in mind, you shouldn't really try to increase your weekly mileage or step count by more than 10%. This is where slow and steady wins the race!

And remember, positive self-talk will not only get you through your daily walk but will start seeping into the rest of your life, too. That's what we call a win win situation!

What's your why?

When it's going well, exercising is great. But as soon as your energy starts to flag, not so good...and you may start wondering, 'Why am I actually doing this when I could be in bed/at home watching Netflix?' Keeping yourself motivated is a big part of exercising and it starts with setting goals for yourself. The things that are important to YOU. Your reason for want to exercise is as personal as you are. Maybe you want to do it to stay fit, to battle health issues, to lose weight, to manage your menopausal symptoms, or to meet new friends...

Not sure? Ask yourself the following:

- Why have you started exercising?
- What do you gain from it?
- What would you miss out in if you had to stop?

Be accountable

Even though walking is an individual activity, sometimes we all need someone to turn up for to make sure we actually get out of the door. Accountability makes you 85-90% more likely to achieve your goals. That's why walking groups are great for support, motivation, and accountability because unlike a solo walk, where the only person you have to answer to for not going is yourself, a group means there are more people who are counting on you to show up, and who you'd let down if you don't - and that can be a big motivator!

Walking groups also typically set a goal that you're working towards – like your first 10,000 steps - so you know that missing a week will put you on the back foot. And when you walk with a group of people – even virtually - there is always the extra motivation to keep up with them, and to push yourself harder and so helps pull you along.

Build in some strength training

If you are only doing cardio, like fast walking, you're likely to start losing muscle as you approach menopause. You therefore need to add some type of weight training to your routine. This is important on two fronts: to burn more calories and raise the metabolism; and to maintain bone density. Because when you stress the muscles, the tendons which are attached to the bone pull on it; the bone thinks it needs assistance and stores more calcium, and your bone density increases.

So, if you're heading towards menopause, try and incorporate some strength exercises into your schedule two to three times a week to build and maintain muscle tissue. This will help to increase your metabolic rate and bone density and promote joint flexibility. Even better, a stronger body should also help you to improve your technique, boost your self-esteem, help you feel better about yourself overall. Win-win!

If the thought of lifting traditional weights is unappealing, there are other options. You could try a high-intensity interval training (HIIT) workout that uses some weights such as a kettle bell or try a type of yoga that really engages your muscles and core (like power yoga or vinyasa). The best news: yoga has also been shown to reduce other menopausal symptoms like brain fog, hot flashes, and insomnia.

HSAH classes that will complement your walking include:

- Lesley Waldron's strength classes - these are ideal for any beginner to strength training
- Clara Mosha's strength classes - these are ideal for those with experience with strength training/classes
- Carolyn Atkin's pilates classes - target your core and balance
- Caroline Kerslake's resistance band classes - use your resistance bands to help build strength

Having a bad day - or week? Don't panic

Accept that we all have down days. Maybe we're tired, maybe we've been overdoing the miles, maybe we've not been eating properly, maybe it's that time in your cycle when everything seems that little bit harder... exercising included.

Look at the bigger picture. There are so many soooo many! - reasons why exercising is good for you. One bad day now and then seems a small price to pay for the benefits you gain, improved sleep, reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other chronic health conditions, for starters.

Think of the mental toughness you're gaining. Ok so it was a bad walk but hey you did it, and you got through it. How many other areas of your life could you transfer these tools to...? Remind yourself that one bad day doesn't define you. There's always another day. This was just a blip. It doesn't mean you're a rubbish person or that you should give up. Come on! You're so much stronger than that.

Write about your walks in a journal. It's a great way to keep track of your progress, work through your frustration, and remind yourself of other challenges you've been through.

Where next?

Regularly completing 10,000 steps a day? Why not think about giving our Run Walk Run group a go?

Where can I get support?

If you need support and advice in increasing your steps you could:

- Visit our [lifestyle Facebook group](#) and leave a question for Gail or one of our fitness instructors
- Email support@harleystathome.com