

In a world of spinning classes and vibrating, muscle-toning platforms, it might seem oddly old-fashioned, but as a form of exercise – and a route to all-round improved health – walking is top of the tree.

What's so good about it?

Any program of exercise will help boost your fitness levels, keep your heart healthy and burn calories. Walking is an excellent calorie-burner, but unlike jogging or an aerobics class, it is relatively low-impact and you're far less likely to get uncomfortably sweaty, making it ideal to do in your lunch break or as part of your every day routine.

It has additional health benefits too. According to studies by the British Heart Foundation and the US department of health, it can reduce the risk of osteoporosis through increased bone density.

It has also been shown to improve mood and reduce anxiety and stress – especially if you can stroll somewhere calming and pleasant like a pretty canal path or public gardens.

How much weight can I lose?

In a nutshell, it depends how much you want to lose and how much time you put in. A few simple steps, like leaving the car at home and walking to the office or to drop the kids at school can be enough to maintain your weight, whereas an hour's walking a day could help you drop two pounds a week if you're sensible about what you eat.

How far do I need to walk?

Every mile covered burns around 100 calories, but the speed you go doesn't make much difference – so even a dawdle can pay dividends if you go far enough.

If you're serious about losing weight and getting fit, invest a couple of pounds in a pedometer. It's a nifty little gadget that attaches to your waistband and counts the number of steps you



take each day. Try wearing it for a couple of days and noting how many steps you take. Over the next week aim to do an extra 1,000 steps a day. The following week try and do another 1,000 steps each day. Keep doing this until you're doing at least 10,000 steps every day. If you consistently hit 10,000 daily steps, the weight should steadily fall off.

I have health problems, should I start a program of walking?

Walking is very low-impact and a great way to build your fitness back up after a period of ill-health. It is wise to consult your doctor though, especially if you have problems with your legs, abdomen, back or heart.

How can I increase the impact?

If you want a bit more of a power work-out, check out Nordic walking – an innovative way to walk using hand-held poles to increase the intensity of the work-out.

Originally devised to help cross country skiers stay fit during summer, Nordic walking hit the UK in 2001 in the form of classes and walking groups.

Burning around 20% more calories than a normal stroll, it's easy to see why Nordic walking is fast gaining fans.

Those on the web can find out more at www.nordicwalking.co.uk.