

How to Organize

Follow these four simple steps, and you'll be on your way to plotting a course with your new Walking Club.

Step 1: Pick Your Target Audience

Each Walking Club should consist of five to 15 members. But what type of walker do you want to enlist? Maybe all are welcome, no matter their age or fitness level. Or maybe you want to recruit people with shared interests and other similarities. Consider these target groups:

- Beginners
- Racewalkers, powerwalkers or Nordic (pole) walkers
- Mall walkers
- Seniors
- Singles or couples
- Parents with children in strollers
- Dog owners
- Co-workers
- Neighborhood newcomers
- People with certain conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes

Step 2: Set a Time

Pick a time that's convenient for your Walking Club members and you'll get a better turnout at the starting line.

- **Time of day.** Some people prefer to get their morning jolt from a sunrise walk instead of a cup of coffee. For others, a tempting snooze button may sabotage good intentions for an early morning jaunt. Whether walks are scheduled for morning, afternoon or evening, choose a time of day that Walking Club members are most likely to stick with. Also consider the time of year. Walks during summer months may need a start time before noon or after 3 p.m. to avoid the steamiest part of the day.
- **How often to meet.** Make sure your Walking Club meets at least once or twice a week for close to a total of 75 minutes or more of moderate-intensity walking.
- **Weekdays or weekends.** It may be easier for on-the-go parents or people who work full-time to fit in weekend walks. Retirees, on the other hand, may prefer to spend weekdays with a Walking Club.
- **Work around daily commitments.** For a workplace Walking Club, schedule outings at a time when there are no recurring meetings. And for parents with afternoon nappers, mid-day may be booked.
- **Plan around a regular event.** Start or end the walk just in time for an existing event, such as a local farmers market or children's storytime at a local library or bookstore.
- **Don't forget about yourself.** Make sure it's a time you can commit to as the Walking Club leader.

Step 3: Select a Route

Whether it's a park, a strip of beach or the streets outside your front door, finding a great place to walk will keep Walking Club members coming back for more. Just keep a few criteria in mind.

- **Identify a path that's free and safe.** Find out if the park or area is managed and regularly maintained. A walk may not go smoothly if there are more than a few bumps along the way. Some other must-haves: lights, water fountains and restrooms. You can also check the area's safety history by calling the police department. You might even ask if they can schedule regular patrols along your route.
- **Stay close to where people live and work.** Choose a route near home or the office. Walking Club members are more likely to pop over for a walk that's nearby or make a stop that's conveniently on their way home from work or school.
- **Take the scenic route.** Give members a walk with a view. Look for hiking trails, waterfront walkways or neighborhoods with historic homes.
- **Do a test walk.** Size up the route at the time of day you plan to walk. A peaceful test walk in the evening may turn out to be a hazardous endeavor for a walk scheduled at rush hour. This is also a good time to pinpoint the meeting spot and where people can park or catch public transportation.

Still need a little help? The American Heart Association has established thousands of safe and centrally located walking paths around the country. You can find them on our Walking Clubs resources page at http://www.startwalkingnow.org/start_walking_paths.jsp.

Step 4: Have a Backup Plan

Some days, the great outdoors aren't too inviting. But don't try to brave the elements. If snow blankets your walking route, or sizzling heat makes walking outside unbearable, take it indoors. Backup locations may include malls, school hallways or an indoor walking track at a community center or university.

DOES YOUR ROUTE PASS THE WALKABILITY TEST?

- Did you have room to walk?
- Was it easy to cross streets?
- Did drivers behave well?
- Was it easy to follow safety rules, such as using crosswalks and walking on sidewalks or shoulders facing traffic?
- Was your walk pleasant and safe?

"It is wonderful for a person to walk regularly. When a Walking Club is formed, then the community becomes involved, which is even better. Walking in the neighborhood shows others that the community is a safe place to walk and invites others to join."

Deborah Rohm Young, PhD

University of Maryland School of Public Health
Physical Activity Committee vice-chair,
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Physical Activity and Metabolism



Walk with Walgreens is a proud national supporter of the American Heart Association's Walking Clubs.