

Walking the right way can give you better health, fitness and attitude for training. Avoiding these common mistakes will help you walk faster and more smoothly. Walking the wrong way can lead to wasted effort or even injury.

Mistake #1: Over Striding

When you try to walk faster, the natural inclination is to lengthen your stride in front, reaching out further with your forward foot. This leads to a clumsy, ungainly gait, striking hard with the feet. Your shins hurt and you really don't get any faster.

Remedy

All of the power of your walk comes from pushing with the back leg and foot. If you are trying to walk fast, concentrate on taking shorter, quicker steps. Then think of really rolling through your step with your back foot and leg, getting a good push-off. The result will be faster feet and lengthening your stride where it does you some good - in back.

Mistake #2: The Wrong Shoes

- Heavy
- Stiff - soles won't bend, can't twist them.
- Over a year old.
- Too small when foot swells while walking.

If this describes your shoes, you are setting yourself up for plantar fasciitis, muscle pulls and knee problems. Plantar fasciitis is a pain in the bottom of your foot that especially hurts first thing in the morning when you try to get out of bed and stand, or if you stand after sitting for a while.

Remedy

Get fitted for the right shoes at a technical running shoe store in your area. These shoe experts will make sure you get the right shoe for overpronation, flexible enough for walking and sized right for foot expansion.

Mistake #3: Flapping, Slapping, "Flat" Feet

- Your feet hit the ground with a slap.
- You land flat-footed with each step and get no roll.
- You may develop shin pain.

This means that instead of rolling through the step with your forward foot, it is flattening out prematurely. Either you are fighting stiff, heavy shoes or your shins are too weak to let you roll through the step.

Remedy

Get flexible shoes that bend at the ball of the foot. A pair of running shoes with a low heel is best. To strengthen your shins, ankles and lower legs:

- Toe raises: Stand on a stair facing upstairs with your heels hanging over the edge. Dip the heels down, and then raise them high. Repeat 10-20 times.
- Foot fun: While sitting around, several times a day, tap your toes quickly for several seconds. Then write the alphabet in the air with your foot. Repeat with the other foot.
- Heel walking: As part of your warm-up, walk on your heels for 30 seconds.

Mistake #4: Look, Ma, No Arms

You keep your arms still at your sides while walking, or swing them without bending them. You notice that your hands swell after walking for a while. Normal walking motion uses the arms to counterbalance the leg motion. A walker can add power and speed by using the arms efficiently. Long, straight arms act like a long pendulum, slowing you down.

Remedy

Bend your arms 90 degrees and swing them naturally back and forth opposite the leg motion.

Mistake #5: Chicken Winging and Flinging

You swing your arms from side to side, crossing the center of your body and extending out to endanger passersby. Or you bring your fists up on each swing, past your breast, up even to your chin or threatening your nose.

Remedy

Keep your elbows close to your body and swing your arms mostly back and forward, as if reaching for your wallet from a back pocket on the backstroke. As they come forward, your hands should not cross the centerline and should come up no further than your breasts. This arm motion will give power to your walk. Your feet generally move only as fast as your arms.

Mistake #6: Head Down

You are always looking down, hanging your head and staring at your feet.

Remedy

Look up! Good posture for walking allows you to breathe well and provides a long bodyline to prevent problems with your back, neck, and shoulders.

- Chin up when walking - it should be parallel to the ground.
- Your eyes should focus on the street or track 10 - 20 feet ahead.

Mistake #7: Leaning and Swaying

- You lean forward more than five degrees.
- You lean back.
- You have a sway back with or without a forward lean.

Somewhere you read to lean forward when walking. Or, you may be leaning back on your hips. Leaning forward or backwards or holding your back swayed can all result in back pain and does not increase your speed.

Remedy

Stand up straight but with relaxed shoulders, chin up and parallel to the ground. Think about walking tall. Think "suck in your gut, tuck in your butt." Your back should have a natural curve, but do not force it into an unnatural sway with behind out back, stomach out or forward.

Mistake #8 The Wrong Clothes

- You walk at night wearing dark colored clothing with no reflective stripes or a safety vest.
- You are always wearing too much or not enough; you end up sweaty and clammy in any weather.
- No hat.

Remedy

When training, especially at night, wear a mesh reflective safety vest that can be purchased at a local biking or running shop. Or put reflective strips on your nighttime walking outfit. It is best to have several reflective elements so you can be seen from all directions.

- For walking comfort, dress in layers. The inner layer should be of a fabric such as CoolMax or polypropylene that will wick sweat away from your body to evaporate - not cotton, which holds it in next to the skin. The next layer should be insulating - a shirt or sweater that can be easily removed if you warm up. The outer layer should be a jacket that is windproof, and waterproof or water-resistant in wet climates.
- Hats are essential equipment. They shield the top of your head from the sun - an area where it is hard to apply sunscreen. Hats with visors also shield your face from sun exposure.

Mistake #9 Not Drinking Enough Water

You are not drinking enough water before, during and after walking.

Remedy

A good rule of thumb is to drink every 15 minutes, consuming at least one 28 oz. bottle of fluid per hour. It is recommended to consume one bottle of electrolyte drink for every two bottles of water. Ten minutes before your walk, drink a glass of water. After you finish, drink a glass or two of water.

Mistake #10 Overtraining

You walk and walk and walk. But you have lost your enthusiasm. You feel tired, irritable. You always have aches and pains. You may be overdoing it.

Remedy

Take a day off now and then to let your body repair, build muscle, and store energy to get you back on the road again.