

# A Cardio Plan That Takes Off the Weight

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## [Improve Your Walking Technique](#)

Four to five times per week, do any of the following 35-minute workouts. The levels below are based on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is kicking back on the couch and 10 is pushing so hard you're gasping for breath. (No 10s here, no worries.) After each workout, cool down at a slow pace for 5 minutes.



### **Walk/Run (indoor or outdoor)**

1. Walk at a moderate pace (level 4) for 5 minutes.
2. Pick up speed until you're walking at a fast pace (levels 5–6) for 3 minutes.
3. Increase pace to a run (levels 7–8) for 2 minutes.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 five more times.

### **Elliptical trainer**

1. Work at a moderate resistance and slight incline (level 4) for 5 minutes.
2. Increase pace (levels 6–7) for 2 minutes.
3. Keeping the same speed, increase incline for 1 minute (levels 8–9).
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 nine more times.

### **Bike (indoor or outdoor)**

1. Pedal at a moderate speed and/or resistance (level 4) for 5 minutes.
2. Increase speed and/or resistance (levels 6–7) for 2 minutes.
3. Pick up pace a little more (levels 8–9) for 1 minute.
4. Repeat steps 2 and 3 nine more times.

A physical therapist once told me that he could almost always predict which runner would win a race just from observing his or her hip motion. "The more control you have over your hips," he said, "the better you perform."

Aside from looking less than graceful, a sloppy gait is a waste of energy and a sure way to injure yourself. By delegating some of the load to your abdominal and hip muscles,

you can walk faster and more efficiently, reduce your risk of injury, and eliminate much of walking's joint-jarring impact. With fewer pains and strains, you might even walk farther. And that means you'll burn more calories.

If you think about how you walk and you know the correct way, you'll simply do it better. This walking-awareness checklist will get you started.

**Pull your navel toward your spine.** Your abdominal muscles will form a girdle of stability, and your movements will be more controlled (you'll have great abs, besides). As you walk, let your arms swing, but try not to swivel your torso—its job is to support movement.

**Consciously engage your butt and thigh muscles.** As you prepare to take a step, focus on your trailing leg, creating a crease where your butt and thigh meet by lifting your cheek and tightening your hamstring. Continue to use those muscles as you bring that leg forward. Notice how your inner thigh muscles keep your knee pointed forward and stabilize your leg.

**Walk with your toes pointing forward.** "Turning your toes out can stress the knees," Tripp says. When you walk, allow your heel to strike first, then push off from the big toe, flexing at the ankle.

**Relax your shoulders.** Hold them back and down, and resist the tendency to hunch or shrug.

**Hold your head high.** Loping forward headfirst stresses your neck and throws your gait off balance. To distribute the force of gravity over your body along the natural curves of your spine, walk as if you're suspended by a string attached to the top of your head. Or just recall that old charm-school drill of walking while balancing a book on your head.

Sure, it takes work to imagine, and place, your body into a perfect walking posture. But in the two months since I attended the workshop, I've been surprised at how aware I am of the way I move and stand. I haven't revolutionized my walk, but for now, it's nice to know I'm moving in a healthier way.

Whether you're testing out a great urban trail or walking in your own neighborhood, you can boost your calorie burn, walk faster, and stay injury-free by having good form. Here's what to do, courtesy of Contributing Editor Mark Fenton, co-author of *Pedometer*

### **Tips for Increased Calorie Burning**

You'll burn 170 calories per hour walking at a leisurely pace (2 mph), 238 calories per hour at a moderate pace (3 mph), and 272 calories per hour at a brisk pace (4 mph). All counts are based on a 150-pound person.

If you like listening to music, choose fast-paced songs and step to the rhythm; it'll help quicken your pace and burn more calories. For safety, wear earphones only when walking in a familiar area.

### **Pointers on Body Positioning**

**Your head:** Look straight ahead, not down at the ground.

**Your arms:** Relax your arms by your sides and swing them front to back, not out to the sides; your hands shouldn't come up higher than your breastbone. On hills, bend your arms to 90 degrees for more pumping power.

**Your hips and waist:** Stand tall and keep your hips positioned directly above your feet. Don't lean forward or back from the waist, even when going up hills (although it's OK to sit back slightly when heading downhill, as long as you keep your weight over your feet).

**Your legs:** Stick with your natural stride length to help avoid shin pain, the most common complaint among walkers. To increase your speed, focus on taking quicker steps, not longer ones.

**Your feet:** Land on your heel first, then roll through to the ball of your foot.

**Your shoes:** Choose a walking shoe with a rugged tread and rounded heel. It should bend easily at the ball (not the arch) of your foot.