



Let's Get Walking Halton Hills!

**A Guide to Starting Your Own
Walking Club**



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Why is Walking the Most Popular Form of Exercise?

When it comes to simple ways to be active, walking is all the rage! At any age, the benefits of simply putting one foot in front of the other are endless. You can get active in many ways, but walking is one of the easiest! It's safe, easy to stick with, and low- or no-cost. It doesn't require any special skills or equipment. It's a great way to meet new people or reconnect with family, friends, and neighbours. You can catch up, de-stress and get the exercise your body needs. Turn exercise into a social occasion!



What is a Walking Club?

“Let's Get Walking Halton Hills” is a simple self-motivated initiative created to inspire Halton Hills residents to take action and commit to a healthier, happier you... by creating a walking club. Are you tired of walking alone? Looking for a new way to motivate yourself and others to get moving? Starting your very own Walking Club is a great way to expand your workout group and improve heart health.



Walking clubs are groups that meet periodically to walk together. They generally cover a planned route at a predetermined pace within a set time period. Some groups meet once a week; others meet multiple times a week. Some stick with the same route while others choose to switch things up.



They are everywhere: outdoors on city streets, rural roads, nature trails and garden paths; indoors at recreation centres and sports complexes – they're even at the mall! People of all ages are getting together in large and small groups to chat, laugh, share, and support.



Who is a Walking Club for?

It is for everyone! Family, neighbours, friends, retirees, workplace colleagues, and people who you may not even know and just see in passing.

Benefits

Walking groups can improve the health of people with chronic health conditions, such as arthritis, dementia, depression, and Parkinson's disease. Walking groups also help promote physical activity among adults and have added benefits including increased motivation and opportunity for socializing.

- **Strengthens social connections:**
Creating a walking club helps you connect with others and make friends. Group walkers attribute a boost in their well-being to the social support they get from their walking buddies. Considering nearly half of us feel lonely all or some of the time (and a busy work week can make it difficult to make time for friends *and* exercise), a walking group can help you re-prioritize both.
- **Improves Mood:**
Walking can make you feel better, even if you're feeling less-than-enthusied when you first get moving, a brisk walk encourages the release of mood-boosting endorphins, and in the long term, it may even lower your risk of depression.
- **Boosts Heart Health:**
Walking can improve your cardiovascular fitness, lower your blood pressure and "bad" cholesterol levels, and, in turn, reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. What's more, heart health improvements are even greater when you're walking with others.
- **Helps You Get Stronger:**
Working out with others consistently means you'll have like-minded friends to motivate you when you don't feel like exercising, and they'll keep you challenged. This could mean starting a strength-training routine together or adding bodyweight movements to your next group walk.
- **It's Safe:**
There's safety in numbers, so with your walking group you'll feel comfortable exploring new parts of your town or walking when it's darker out.
- **It will help Celebrate Achievements:**
Sticking to a regular exercise routine isn't easy, so when you reach a health goal or walk more kilometers than you ever have, you should celebrate! Your walking club will understand the significance of your accomplishment and be around to help you commemorate the moment.

Looking for Help Getting Started?

Reach out to Sandy Rahn - Active Living Programmer, sandyr@haltonhills.ca. Sandy will even come to meet your walking club and provide helpful and encouraging tips along the way!

Share your Walking Club on Social Media!

Post pics of your walking club using the hashtag #letsgetwalkinghaltonhills. When you post pictures, you have a chance to win free swag for your walking club including t-shirts, water bottles, bags etc.

The Basics of Walking:

What you Need

- **Walking Shoes:** Before you lace up, make sure your shoes were made for walking. They should be lightweight, breathable and provide support in the right places. Walkers' land on their heels, so cushioning is thickest at the heel. Test the shoe's flexibility by trying to bend it with your hands. A bendable shoe allows your foot to easily roll forward and push off with the toes. Most importantly, make sure you are wearing a shoe that fits properly, with the socks you plan to wear.
- **Clothing:** Dress for comfort and the weather. Avoid wearing cotton, which absorbs moisture and leaves you wet and cold. Stay dry by wearing synthetic "wicking" fabrics that draw sweat away from the skin. Light-colored clothing reflects sunlight and keeps you cool in the summer. Winterize your walking attire by adding a layer or two of clothing. Don't forget your hands and head, make sure to have mittens and a hat or scarf. Layers are easy to shed as you warm up on the walk.
- **Water:** Take frequent sips of water while you walk, even if you're not thirsty. Hydrate before you walk and after. Be mindful of the hotter days as you will need to hydrate more.
- **Sun Protection:** Don't let sunburn spoil a walk. Protect your skin by applying sunscreen with a SPF of at least 15. Cover up with a hat and sunglasses with UV protection.



How do you start your own Walking Club?

Pick Your Target Audience

What type of walker do you want to enlist? All should be welcome, no matter their age or fitness level. Recruit people with shared interests and other similarities.

Consider these target groups:

- Beginners
- Racewalkers,
- Power walkers 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



Pick a time

You'll get a better turnout if you have some structure and set a time.

- **Time of day:** A morning walk is a great start to a day, an afternoon walk is a great mid-day break, an evening walk is a wonderful finish to an already accomplished day. Whether walks are scheduled for morning, afternoon, or evening, choose a time of day that Walking Club members are most likely to stick with. 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:** Once or twice a week is best, 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. 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 Saturday, for the Georgetown farmers market, or children’s story time, at the Acton or Georgetown library.

Select a Route

It could be a park, community centre grounds, new subdivision, or a path through a forest, finding a great place to walk will keep Walking Club members coming back. Check out the Town of Halton Hills Trail Map at www.haltonhills.ca/trails.

Keep a few points in mind

- Identify a path that’s public 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 considerations if you are out for a longer period: lights, water fountains and restrooms.
- 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. Its important to consider meeting points and parking accessibility.

Have a Backup Plan

Some days, mother nature has different plans, so you may not want 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, or local arenas. The Town of Halton Hills offers a Walk Fit Pass all year round! Click on the link to learn more: www.haltonhills.ca/passes.

Name your walking group

Come up with a name to call your walking group. It can be as easy as your neighbourhood name.

Invite, Invite, Invite, The more the merrier!

- Post your walking group Meet Up: www.meetup.com
- Send invitations to others using link from the Town of Halton Hills Meetup calendar to family, friends, neighbours and ask them to share or forward to their friends, family, and neighbours.
- Set up a Facebook page, Facebook Event, or other social media accounts.
- Place flyers at the meet up location or designated areas in the neighbourhood.
- When your group is out walking together, have some business cards printed with the walking group name, contact numbers to give out to interested people. In time, you may even want to create your own branded walking shirts that will let others know who you are.

Set goals for your group

There are lots of ways to help your group get motivated to keep meeting and walking.

- ParticipACTION has a Community Better Challenge where you can help the Town become known as Canada's most active community by tracking your minutes daily. The Challenge begins May 31 and runs until June 16. Click the link to learn more. www.participaction.com/en-ca/programs/community-challenge

TIPS:

Remember everyone is different and everyone's motivation is different. Here are some side notes to pass along to your team of Walkers:

- **Start slow and work up.** If you haven't exercised in a while, take it slow and make sure the speed and length of your walk match your fitness level. The talk test is an easy way to check whether you should speed up or slow down. If you can sing your favorite tune, pick up the pace. If a conversation with a walking buddy leaves you breathless, ease off. Start simple with walking 15 minutes a day. Then progressively challenge yourself until you reach at least 150 minutes of walking each week.
- **Count your Steps:** Use a step-tracking app or a pedometer. Counting your steps will encourage you to increase your activity. Step-tracking helps you overcome fitness plateau, stay accountable, and appreciate your progress. The popular daily step goal is 10,000 steps.
- **Mark your calendar:** Calendar your walks, by seeing it on your to do list, will encourage you not to miss your walks.
- **Set specific goals:** There are many benefits to walking, but each person has their own reasons. Find Your reason. Want to lose weight? Need to lower your blood pressure? Want to have more energy? Setting clear goals will help you track your progress. But be realistic. Start with small goals that are easy to attain. Whether big or small a goal is a goal!
- **Write it down:** Keep a personal walking log. Simply writing down how long you walked, how far and how you felt can help you track your progress.
- **Stick with the basics:** Keep it simple and develop a walking plan that works for you. Personalize your walking plan. You may be walking as a group, but the path to better health is different for each person. Create a personalized walking plan that allows you to set your own pace and get the most out of your workout.

- Track your progress, your group can set a goal to walk a certain number of kilometers in a certain amount of time. Choose to count kilometers walked as a collective group or individually, or perhaps you want to track by minutes.
- When you achieve your goals celebrate as a group and bring everyone together

Be flexible

Once your group gets going, you may find that not everyone wants the same things. Some may be looking for an opportunity to talk about work, while others may not want to talk about work at all. Some may want quick and easy walks, while others may want more challenging walks. It is okay to break into smaller groups and form new groups to meet the needs of everyone.



How to Promote?

Use social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Meetups. Within these social media options create a page for your Walking Club. Post updates on future walks, share photos and videos from the outings, and stay connected with members between walks.

Put the Walking Club on display. Showcase your Walking Club on posters and flyers. Ensure flyers include the following, the solgan, the time, date and location of your walk, your contact information, and the health perks of walking.

Go to where your audience is:

- Workplace cafeteria or break room
- Parks
- Community centers
- Fitness centers
- Libraries
- Doctor's office
- Dog park or veterinarian's office
- Childcare centers
- Neighborhood gatherings
- Senior centres
- Condo buildings
- Grocery store
- Laundry mat



How to keep your walking club successful

Mix It Up After a while

- Experiment with different walking routes. A change of scenery may be exactly what's needed to keep everyone engaged. If the usual route keeps you on flat terrain, find some hills. Or if you typically trek a park, take to the streets.
- Speed things up and boost your game with interval walking such as: Take off with short bursts of fast walking. Slow down to a steady pace for a couple blocks and then speed up again. It not only adds variety, but you'll also burn more calories and be able to walk longer and with more intensity.
- Start the conversation. Give them something to talk about by selecting a topic for the walk. They can chat about the latest book they're reading or favorite vacation spots.
- Recognize your Walking Club when they reach special milestones – 25 km, 50 km, or set the bar at a certain number of steps or hours walked. This is also a way for members keep track of their progress in a walking log, where they'll be reminded of their goals. Take pride in the success of your walkers by sharing their triumphs on social media.

Do something new and achieve more with your Walking Club

Encourage your walkers to engage in new adventures and special events, such as:

- Turn a walk into a mission by entering charity walks together.
- Organize mileage challenges, either as individuals or as a group against other Walking Clubs. You can also pair up your walkers for a walking scavenger hunt.
- Try a different physical activity from time to time. Take a dance or yoga class or take a bike tour in your town.
- Walk 'n learn. Invite local experts to talk about health and fitness. Ask a dietitian to discuss healthy eating, a fitness trainer to demonstrate stretching exercises and proper walking technique, and a foot specialist to talk about how to prevent foot problems
- Combine activities by adding an activity to your walk. The Club could take a “litter walk” and clean up a walking route, or schedule a post-walk picnic, barbecue, or playdate.
- Start a spinoff by forming other groups, such as a book club, bridge club or sports team.

Stretches

Stretching before you walk helps decrease the chance of injury, increase your performance during your walk and decrease muscle soreness after you walk how to stretch properly
The Best Stretches.

Inner thigh Stretch:

Stand with your feet wide apart. Keep one leg straight and your toes pointing forward while bending the other leg and turning your toes out to the side. Lower your groin towards the ground and rest your hands on your bent knee or ground.



Hip flexor stretch:

Lunge one leg forward with knee bent. Keep the back leg straight or slightly bent. Push your hips forward until you feel a stretch in front of your back thigh near the groin. Keep your torso upright and your front knee behind your toes.



Hamstring stretch:

Prop one foot up on a low, secure bench or stairstep. Stand tall. While keeping your chest high, hips square and tailbone lifted, bend forward from your hips.



Calf stretch:

Stand facing a wall and place both hands on it. Position one foot forward with knee bent and the other leg back with the leg straight, toes pointing at the wall. With your stomach tight, lean in toward the wall.



Standing Quad Stretch:

Grab a stable support, like a chair, couch or wall. Hold on to the chair with your left hand. Bend your right knee, and, using your right hand, grab your leg by the ankle and gently pull your foot towards your bottom.



Standing Chest Stretch:

Stand tall and simply pull arms straight and back as far as you comfortable can and feel the chest open.



Leg Swings:

Stand straight with your feet hip-width apart and hold onto a wall. Keeping one leg stationary, slowly swing the opposite leg forward and backward in a single smooth movement.



Lower back stretch:

Stand tall and gently tip back from the hips until you feel a light stretch in the low back.



Tips on Safe Walking

- Make it easy for drivers to see you. Wear light-colored clothing, especially when it's dark. Even better, wear reflective clothing or carry a flashlight.
- Use the buddy system, always plan to walk with two other people to ensure everyone's safety.
- Always walk on the sidewalk. For neighborhoods without sidewalks, walk facing traffic. That way, even if drivers can't see you, you can see them.
- Watch your footing. Beware potholes, tree roots, rocks and uneven ground.
- Take notice of the traffic – both cars and fast-moving bikers – around you before crossing or entering a street.
- Injury-Proof Your Walk. Don't get sidelined by a walking injury. Keep your strides long and strong by learning how to prevent the pains and strains of walking.
- Healthcare providers can provide useful, personalized advice on how to reduce risk of injuries. If you have a chronic health condition, see a healthcare provider before beginning a new physical activity routine.

- Loosen up. Warm up cold muscles by walking at an easy pace for the first few minutes. After your warm-up, take the time to stretch. Flexibility exercises should focus on your hamstrings, calves, hips and chest. Once you feel a slight pull, hold the stretch for 20 to 30 seconds. End each walk with the same stretches.
- Replace old shoes. Although you don't need to worry about breaking in walking shoes, you do need to worry about wearing them out. Hit the road in a new pair every three to six months.
- Walk the right way. Is it possible to walk wrong? YES! A sloppy gait slows you down and puts stress on your muscles and joints. Walk faster and farther by having good form. Keep your head up, stomach in and shoulders relaxed. Allow your heel to hit the ground first, then roll your foot and push off from the toe. And stick to your natural step length. If you want to pick up speed, take quicker steps instead of longer ones.

Resources of Walking Paths, Trails, Parks, Cycling Maps and Town of Halton Hills Fitness Programs.

Link to Walking paths, Hiking trails and other useful information:

- www.haltonhills.ca/en/explore-and-play/trails.aspx?_mid_=28674
- www.google.com/search?q=walking+paths+in+halton+hills&rlz

Link to Parks and activity specific information:

- www.haltonhills.ca/en/explore-and-play/parks-and-trails.aspx?_mid_=28671

Link to Cycling programs and additional information:

- www.haltonhills.ca/en/explore-and-play/cycling-programs.aspx

Town of Halton Hills Fitness Programs and descriptions:

- www.haltonhills.ca/en/explore-and-play/program-registration.aspx