

If you have not exercised for a long time we recommend you see your doctor before you start your new training plan. Don't over do it and make sure you keep your plan varied and fun!

It is important that you eat and drink well to maintain a good walking performance and health. Eating the wrong food, or drinking too little water, can leave you feeling tired, run down and deflated.

<p>Month 1</p>	<p>When beginning your training programme, try to build up your fitness levels – don't try to do too much before you are ready. Aim for three exercise sessions per week, building up to 30 minutes of exercise each session. Target = 3 sessions of 30 minute exercise per week</p>	<p>Month 2</p>	<p>Now you are able to complete three sessions of exercise per week, you should look to build this up slightly. Continue your routine of three sessions of at least 30 minutes' exercise each week, but aim to walk a total of six miles each week. Target = 4-6 miles of walking per week</p>
<p>Month 3</p>	<p>Build up your stamina slowly by increasing the length of your walk a little for each session. Again, try two to three shorter sessions of around three miles' each during the week, and a longer walk on the weekend to reach the target. Target = 6-10 miles of walking per week</p>	<p>Month 4</p>	<p>Now you are building up stamina, you should be ready to increase your walking targets. Target = 10-14 miles of walking per week</p>
<p>Month 5</p>	<p>You will need to increase your walking distance again this month to 14-16 miles per week. Target = 14-16 miles of walking per week</p>	<p>Month 6</p>	<p>Walk every day for at least one hour. On weekends, walk for four hours on at least one day. Target = 16-20 miles of walking per week</p>

Top tips for training

To ensure that you are comfortable when walking long distances, you must pay attention to your posture and gait. If you walk correctly, at the end of the days' walk you will have sturdy, albeit tired legs, ready for the following day!

Stand tall and keep your head up Take a natural stride length Keep your elbows close to your body

Keep your back straight when coming downhill Shorten your stride when walking uphill

Integrate aerobic exercise – try spinning, swimming and jogging Walk with poles

Wear your walking boots and socks as much as possible, to ensure you are comfortable on the trek

Your diet

Take a look at your basic diet – everyday food has all the nutrients and energy you need for a good balanced diet.

- Carbohydrates are the best source of food for your muscles – eat plenty of pasta, beans, rice, wholegrains, fruit and vegetables.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine – they make you dehydrated.
- Nibble during long walks – for walks of more than two hours you should try to eat a little as you go to replenish your muscle glycogen. Try bananas, cereal bars or dried fruit.
- Refuel after long walks – eat or drink carbohydrate-rich food during the hour (ideally in the first 20 minutes) following a long walk to experience the benefits.

Keep Hydrated

Water is needed to produce sweat (which keeps you cool), and to make sure your body is working properly.

- Don't wait until you are thirsty or your mouth is dry.
- Carry the liquid that you plan to drink in a Camelbak or Platypus, not in your hand – uneven distribution of weight will affect your stride and comfort.
- If you like using energy drinks limit their consumption to 1 litre for every 2 litres of water.
- Drink little and often – small amounts of water every 15 minutes. You should drink at least 1 litre of water per hour while walking.
- Eat foods containing sodium – this can help your body absorb the water it needs.

A word of warning: Avoid training too soon after eating. Blood will be diverted to your muscles rather than being used for digestion, which is likely to lead to stomach upsets.

Fluid output is as important as the input. If you are drinking a great deal but not passing water regularly, you may find you are dehydrated. Watch out for signs of dehydration:

Dry or sticky mucus membranes in the mouth

Fatigue

Dizziness or confusion

Decreased urine output

Darkening in colour of urine Heartburn or stomach ache

Lower back pain

Headache

Psychological irritation or depression

Water retention