



# Walk With Me!

## A tool kit for community organizations and residents starting a walking group



**Healthy Eating Active Living**  
**Saine alimentation et vie active**



*Walk With Me* is a tool kit for community organizations and residents who want to start a walking group. This document provides general information only and users are solely responsible for risks encountered and their own health and safety. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are fully equipped before starting any walk, and any walk you undertake is within the capabilities of you and all your party members. The City of Ottawa shall not be held responsible for any damages and/or claims whatsoever arising from the use of this tool kit

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## Why Walk?

Walking is a great way to get active. It is free, requires little equipment and almost anyone can do it. Walking every day, even in short bouts of 10 minutes, is a good way to meet the 150 minutes of weekly physical activity recommended by the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines. Walking more means better health, improved mental health and better sleeping. Walking to get around town also means lower transportation costs, less traffic congestion, safer streets and less car pollution. Ottawa is home to many paths, natural areas and tourist sites that make it easy to walk year round. Visit the resource section of this tool kit for a list of great places to walk.

## Why Start a Walking Group?

Joining or starting a walking group is a good way to walk regularly, have fun and meet new people. Walking groups can:

- Provide support and motivation to keep people walking.
- Improve safety. There is safety in numbers, groups of walkers are easier for cars to see and walking in groups can address people's fears of walking alone.
- Make physical activity fun.
- Help people socialize and connect with new people in their community.

Check out the [Champlain LHIN Physical Activity Resources List](#) to find a walking group in your area or take the lead and start your own walking group.

## 8 Steps to Starting a Walking Group

Walking groups can take many forms. They can be a group of people or friends who walk from time to time or they can be something more formal with walk leaders, set times and group activities. This tool kit provides tools and tips to help start and maintain any kind of walking group. These steps have been adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions'- Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults Action Guide.<sup>1</sup>

## Step 1: Plan

- ✓ The first step is to find a walk leader in your community. This leader could be you, a resident or a staff person from a local organization. A successful walking group needs at least one champion or leader from the community. The walk leader will:
  - Role model and encourage walkers.
  - Coordinate the members and the walks.
  - Plan the walking routes, including how fast, how long and how often the group will walk.
  - Lead the actual walks or find other volunteers to help lead walks.
  - Set the dates and times for walks.
  - Promote the group and recruit new walkers.
  - Keep track of the number of walkers for each walk.
  - Collect and keep registration information.
  - Check out the condition of walking routes to keep walkers safe.
  - Promote safety by carrying a cell phone and emergency contact numbers during walks.
- ✓ Talk to groups who already meet (example coffee group, book club, bridge club, new moms group) and ask if they would like to start a walking group.
- ✓ Check out what else is going on in the neighbourhood. Can you connect with people who walk regularly, for example dog walkers?
- ✓ Check out what information and tools are available to help your walking group. [Ottawa Public Health's website](#) is a great source for general walking information.
- ✓ Ask community agencies and local businesses to get involved. They could help promote or sponsor your group.
- ✓ Decide on the structure of your group:
  - Will your group be formal?
    - Members register.
    - The walk is lead by a leader and there is an organized walking route and time.
  - Will your group be informal?
    - The group meets up at a time decided by the members and chooses a walk together. The walk is not necessarily led by anyone.
  - Will your group include babies in strollers, dog walkers, seniors, children or adults of all ages?
  - Will your group walk inside or out?
  - Will you walk year round?
  - Will your group look for volunteers? Volunteers can help coordinate the group, lead walks and support walking group members.

## Step 2: Promote Your Group

- ✓ Identify the goals and structure of your group. Give your group a name.
- ✓ Pick a date and time to host a first meeting of your group, to register new members and possibly go for a short walk.
- ✓ Promote your walking group.
  - Post a flyer in recreation centres, apartment buildings, grocery stores, banks, churches, libraries, doctor's offices, pharmacies, senior centres and workplaces.
  - Use social media (example Facebook or Twitter) and the web to help you get the word out.
  - Create a walking group business card and drop it in neighbourhood mailboxes.
  - Bring flyers with you on your walks in case people ask about your group while you are out.
  - Use the community newspaper to advertise your group.
  - Contact [heartwise@ottawaheart.ca](mailto:heartwise@ottawaheart.ca) or 613-761-4753 to have your group added to the [Champlain LHIN Physical Activity Resources List](#).

## Step 3: Get to Know Your Members

When new members join your group, develop a system to collect important information. This will help protect you and your members.

- ✓ **Registration form:** create a registration form. Ask all members to complete the form upon joining your group. A registration form can collect information such as:
  - Walker's names, contact information, and when they are free to walk.
  - Emergency contact information.
  - Health information that the leader should know in the event of an emergency.
  - The walker's ability. This might include their walking history, how far they are comfortable going and what type of routes they prefer (hills, flat, trails, asphalt etc.).
  - A check box to indicate if the walker has completed the PARQ+ self assessment form and feels they are physically able to start walking.
- ✓ **Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire [PAR-Q+](#):** this self assessment tool has questions that help people decide if it is safe for them to start walking or if they should speak to their doctor before becoming more physically active. Ask all walking group members to complete this form before joining the group. It is not the group leader's role to decide if people are fit to walk or not. **Anyone who has any concerns or questions about their health and walking should speak to their doctor.**
- ✓ **Liability Considerations:** In a formal walking group you may wish to consider using an assumption of risk/waiver of liability/release form. The confidential information on this form asks participants to agree and sign that any potential health risks or injuries that happen as a result of being in the walking group are not the legal responsibility of the group leader, volunteer, community organization or other walking group members. This form should be signed, collected and kept locked in a file by the walking group leader.
- ✓ Once members have signed up, provide them with an information package. This package can include:
  - Contact information for the group leader or other members
  - Walking websites and resources
  - A copy of the [Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines](#)
  - A [Walking log](#) to help walkers keep track of their progress
- ✓ Try and find out the walking goals and likes of your members when they sign up.
- ✓ As members sign up, ask them if they would like to help out with the group. You will need volunteers to assist with planning, route mapping and leading the actual walks.
- ✓ Think about how you will keep in contact with all the group members:
  - With your members' permission, create a contact list and share this within the group.
  - Use technology to help your group keep in touch (Email, Twitter, Blogs, Facebook).

## Step 4: Plan Your Walks

Choosing a pleasant and safe route to walk is an important role for the group leader. Decide how often, how long and where your group will walk. Get suggestions from your members.

- ✓ Pick a route that matches the walking abilities of your members. Pick an easy walk for your first outing so that everyone can keep up. For the average person a 2Km walk takes about 30 minutes.
- ✓ Plan your route not just your destination. Choose the safest route even if it means walking for more steps in order to cross at designated crossings and intersections.
- ✓ Aim for a looped walk that begins and ends at the same location. Loops let walkers set their own pace while easily finding their way back to the starting point.<sup>2</sup>
- ✓ Select a route where it is easy to maintain a line of sight between slow and fast walkers. Keeping all walkers in sight helps if there are any safety concerns in your neighbourhood.Error! Bookmark not defined.
- ✓ Choose routes whenever possible that are pleasant, have places of interest and have rest spots and washrooms available.
- ✓ Choose safe walking routes. Does the route have sidewalks, marked walking trails and lighting for evening walks? Try using a [Walkability Checklist](#) to help plan your route.
- ✓ Choose a starting point that has parking and is easy for members to reach by foot, bike or public transit.
- ✓ Provide a spot for your walking group to meet before and after the walk.Error! Bookmark not defined. Your local [City of Ottawa Public Library](#) can be a great meeting and ending spot. Try one of the 1.5 to 2 km walking routes available at all Ottawa Public Library sites.
- ✓ Check out the route planning tools and websites listed in the resource section. Additional resources can be found at <http://ottawa.ca/en/residents/public-health/physical-activity>.
- ✓ Walk the route in advance to make sure it is okay. Share your route with walkers before each walk.
- ✓ In the winter, try walking inside a shopping mall or choose routes that usually have the snow cleared first. Be aware if your regular route is becoming clogged with snow piles and snow banks as these can force walkers onto the roadways.
- ✓ To keep walks interesting try different routes.
- ✓ Try to schedule at least one walk per week. The more walks the better.



## Step 5: Be Prepared

- ✓ Learn CPR and First Aid with the City of Ottawa- [Ottawa's Paramedic Services](#) and encourage other volunteer leaders to learn these skills. Call 311 for more information.
- ✓ Notify all group members of the start location and time for your first walk.
- ✓ Seek out volunteers to help you. Try and find at least 1-2 back up leaders that can step in and lead the walks in your absence.
- ✓ Create a monthly calendar for your group that includes walking dates, times, starting points and routes.
- ✓ Encourage all walkers to wear bright and reflective clothing so that they can be seen. Wearing a light and walking in numbers will help.
- ✓ Have group members sign in before and after the walks.
- ✓ Make sure someone in your group is carrying a cell phone and emergency contact information.
- ✓ In the winter, be prepared for icy conditions and carry grit bags. Suggest walkers consider adding grippers to boots or shoes for safety.
- ✓ In the summer, be prepared for the heat and sun. Encourage walkers to bring water and sun protection.
- ✓ Develop a plan for cancelling walks in the event of bad weather. Freezing rain, extreme heat, storms and lightning can make it unsafe to walk.

## Step 6: Start Walking and Enjoy!

Your group is now ready to start walking.

- ✓ Organize a kick-off event to help launch your group:
  - Have a launch meeting at your first walk to make introductions, collect registration information, review safety tips and get to know all the group members.
  - Pick a name for your walking group.
  - Invite guest speakers or local leaders to come help launch your walking group.
  - Invite the local newspaper to write a story about your group and promote it in the community.
  - Celebrate the event with a social gathering after the walk.
- ✓ Identify the designated leader (s) for the walk.
- ✓ Adjust the walking pace to fit the speed of the group. Walkers should be breathing a little faster than normal but still able to talk easily.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ [The Talk Test](#) is a good tool to help you set the pace. If walkers can carry on a conversation while walking briskly, you are setting a good pace. If walkers are breathless and unable to talk, then slow down.
- ✓ Encourage walkers to buddy up and make sure that the end walkers are not walking alone.
- ✓ If you have enough volunteers, have 3 people lead the walk. Volunteer leaders help keep walkers of all speeds safe. One leader can walk with the faster walkers, one leader can walk in the middle and one can walk with slower walkers.<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ Walk facing traffic if there are no sidewalks.
- ✓ Remind walkers to listen to their bodies and to drink water. Encourage walkers to stop if they feel unwell.
- ✓ Encourage walkers to slow down if they are breathless and cannot walk and talk.

## Step 7: Keep Your Group Motivated

Once your group is up and running, try and keep people interested and involved.

- ✓ Recruit new members and volunteers to help lead and coordinate the walks.
- ✓ Welcome and introduce new walkers at each walk.
- ✓ Invite guest speakers or local businesses to come and speak on topics of interest to the group.
- ✓ Invite a “celebrity walker” to come and walk with your group.
- ✓ Try something new like Geocaching, Nordic Pole Walking, or Frisbee Golf.
- ✓ Plan a [Jane’s Walk](#), a scavenger hunt, view local Christmas lights or organize a walk around a community event, such as Winterlude.
- ✓ Plan a nature walk on one of the many [National Capital Commission \(NCC\) trails](#)
- ✓ Create virtual walking challenges for your group. Identify a location (example Vancouver) and encourage the group to log the kilometres needed to walk there.
- ✓ Link with another walking group and challenge them. See which group can walk further during a period of time. Check the [Champlain LHIN Physical Activity Resources List](#) to find another walking group.
- ✓ Celebrate your walking group! Host a party to celebrate your group’s successes and invite the media and local supporters.
- ✓ Send reminder e-mails to members about upcoming walks and routes. Encourage members to bring a friend with them.
- ✓ Use a pedometer.
  - A pedometer or “step-counter” is a small tool that clips to your waistband. It records the number of steps you take and can help motivate your group by keeping track of how many steps are taken during each walk. Pedometers can be borrowed for free from your local [Ottawa Public Library](#).
- ✓ Keep your group visible in the community and most importantly have fun!
  - Invite the local paper to profile your group.
  - Seek out support from local businesses (donations, promotions etc.).
  - Plan social events for your group. (Potluck dinners, Gatineau Park hikes, water walking during public swim at a [local pool](#)).
  - Wear group t-shirts or hats.
  - Participate in local “cause walks” such as charity walks.

## Step 8: Check in With Your Group

Checking in with your group can help improve it and can also give you information that you can use to promote your group and gain support from local businesses.

- ✓ Ask your walkers for feedback on the group, routes, and any other concerns.
  - A survey is a formal way to hear what group members think. This could be done regularly (every year) or as needed. Share survey results with your walkers.
- ✓ Keep track of:
  - The number of walkers who participate in each walk.
  - The number of walks your group has done (dates, times).
  - The distances and routes for your group walks.
  - The type of walkers that are joining your group (age, sex).

## Walking Resources

Starting a walking group is a great way for you to get more active, help others and get to know your community. For a list of local walking resources visit [Ottawa Public Health's website](#). Here are some other resources to get you started:

### General Physical Activity Information

Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines:  
<http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>

### Walking Groups

Champlain LHIN Physical Activity Resources List:  
[http://www.ottawaheart.ca/content\\_documents/Community-Resources-2011-03-21.pdf](http://www.ottawaheart.ca/content_documents/Community-Resources-2011-03-21.pdf)

### Planning Your Walks

#### Smartphone apps to help you plan your route:

Map My Walk:  
<http://www.mapmywalk.com/imapmy/>

Ottawa Trail Council iPhone app:  
<http://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/otc-mobile/id553713070?mt=8>

Online Ottawa walking maps:  
<http://www.mapmywalk.com/maps/>

Ontario Trails Council/Ottawa Region website for trails, maps and distances:  
<http://ontariotrails.on.ca/trail-regions/ottawa-region>

City of Ottawa biking (and mostly walkable) routes map:  
[http://ottawa.ca/en/roads\\_trans/cycling/cycling\\_map/index.htm](http://ottawa.ca/en/roads_trans/cycling/cycling_map/index.htm)

National Capital Commission trail maps:  
<http://www.canadacapital.gc.ca/places-to-visit/greenbelt/things-to-do/hiking-walking-greenbelt>

Gatineau Park – for year round walking including winter walking.  
<http://www.canadacapital.gc.ca/places-to-visit/gatineau-park/things-to-do/hiking-walking-gatineau-park>

### Walking Safety

Heart Wise Exercise Programs:  
[http://www.ottawaheart.ca/patients\\_family/heart-wise-exercise.htm](http://www.ottawaheart.ca/patients_family/heart-wise-exercise.htm)

CPR and first aid training with the City of Ottawa:  
[http://ottawa.ca/en/health\\_safety/emergency/firstaid/courses/index.html](http://ottawa.ca/en/health_safety/emergency/firstaid/courses/index.html)

Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaires:  
<http://parmedx.appspot.com/#pub/parq>

Daily UV Index and weather forecasts:  
<http://www.theweathernetwork.com/uvreport/uvyow>

Pedestrian safety:  
<http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/topics/pedestrian.shtml>



## Walking Log

Day	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week
Daily Time or Distance Goal (km)											
Monday											
Tuesday											
Wednesday											
Thursday											
Friday											
Saturday											
Sunday											
Weekly total											
Daily average (Weekly total ÷ 7)											

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week in bouts of 10 minutes or more.

Walking is one way to achieve this goal.

## References

1. Partnership for Prevention. Social Support for Physical Activity: Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults – An Action Guide. The Community Health Promotion Handbook: Action Guides to Improve Community Health. Washington, DC: Partnership for Prevention; 2008.
2. Walk Kit – How to Start a Walking Program: A Guide for Local Program Coordinators. California Center for Physical Activity. 2009.
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4. Nguyen MN, Gauvin L, Martineau I, Grignon R. Sustainability of the Impact of a Public Health Intervention: Lessons Learned from the Laval walking Groups Experience. Health Promotion Practice [Internet]. 2005 [cited 2013 Jan 8]; 6(44): [p44-52]. Available from:  
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