Take the next step

TAKE THE NEXT STEP AND CHOOSE TO LIVE BETTER

Take the next step

We all know that being more active is good for our health, but sometimes we overlook the benefits of simple activities like walking. Building up the number of steps we take each day can be an easy and rewarding way to increase the amount of physical activity we do, without having to try too hard.

We want to encourage people across Northern Ireland to think about the number of steps they take every day. By counting the number of steps you already take and setting yourself a target to increase it, you can improve your health and wellbeing. This booklet explains how counting steps can help you get more active, but you can also find more information on our website www.choosetolivebetter.com

Why get active?

Being more physically active has many benefits. It can improve your quality of life by helping you:

- get a better night's sleep
- maintain a healthy weight
- manage stress

Spending too much time sitting down is bad for our health. The evidence shows that breaking up long periods of sitting with short bursts of activity can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Why walk?

Walking can be done almost anywhere, at any time, and in any weather. It's a great way to get from A to B, which means you can fit walking into your daily routine, and it doesn't require expensive equipment or gym membership, just a comfortable pair of shoes.

How do I count my steps?

You can track how many steps you take using a pedometer or other wearable fitness tracker. You can also use a smartphone app, but that relies on you remembering to carry your phone with you all the time.

A pedometer is a small device that detects hip movement. You can get a cheap and simple one which measures the number of steps taken, or a more expensive one which can also calculate calories burned, distance travelled etc.

Choose one that sits securely and comfortably on your belt or waistband, and wear it in a vertical position (not tilted to one side). Position it as close to the top of the hip bone as possible and in line with the knee cap. Look for one that is easy to use and has a protective cover to avoid accidentally resetting it while you are walking. Test the step count to make sure it's accurate, and keep your device away from water or steam.

If you want to use your smartphone to track your steps, many newer models have a step counting app built in or you can download one from an online shop such as Google Play or the App Store.

What else do I need?

You'll need a comfortable pair of shoes or trainers that provide adequate support and don't cause blisters. Loose fitting clothing allows you to move more freely, and thin layers make it easier to adjust as you warm up or cool down. If you're walking to work, just wear a comfy pair of shoes with your usual work clothes.

What's my number?

Start off by tracking how many steps you take over a normal day. The average person takes between 3,000 and 4,000 steps each day. Record your steps each day for a week, then add them up and divide by seven to get a daily average.

Day	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	**Total**
Steps	3,453	4,132	4,775	3,139	3,476	5,457	3,918	28,350

28,350 ÷ 7 = **4,050 daily average**

What's my target?

Starting from your daily average, set your targets so that you build up gradually - for example, you could aim to increase your daily average by 500 steps each week.

Starting daily average: 4,050									
Week	**Daily target**	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	**Average**
1	**4,500**	4,653	4,831	3,679	4,443	4,176	5,430	5,386	4,656
2	**5,000**	5,285	4,937	5,582					
3	**5,500**								
4	**6,000**								

Don't worry if you don't hit your target every single day – every extra step counts! The most important thing to remember is that, even if you can't quite meet the targets, doing something is always better than doing nothing. Every bit of extra activity you do will benefit your health. Whatever your result, knowing how far you can walk in a day can help to motivate you to do more.

If you haven't previously been very active, start slowly and build up gradually. If you have a pre-existing health condition or haven't been physically active for a long time, ask your GP's advice before starting the challenge.

I have a busy life – how do I fit it in?

Increasing your walking is easier than you think. Try these tips for getting more steps into your life:

- get off the bus or train early and walk the rest of the way home or to work
- walk to the station instead of taking the car or bus
- take the stairs instead of the lift, or walk up escalators
- shop locally if you can, on foot
- walk the children to school, whatever the weather
- walk the dog or the neighbour's dog
- walk around while talking on the phone
- instead of emailing or phoning a colleague, walk over to their desk
- instead of catching up with friends over a coffee, meet them for a walk
- take the long route to the loo

I find walking boring. How can I make it more interesting?

Make your walk more appealing by:

- having someone to chat to as you walk
- planning walks to interesting places
- joining a local walking group

If you're the competitive type, you can make increasing your step count into a challenge. You can do it on your own, but it's likely to be more interesting and easier to stay motivated if you do it with friends or family, or even get your workplace or local community group involved (you can find a toolkit for running a group challenge on www.choosetolivebetter.com). You can use an app to track your progress or use the step log provided in this booklet.

- Decide how you are going to count your steps (see above).
- Find out and record how many steps you already take each day.
- Choose how many steps you're aiming for – 10,000 steps a day is a great target.
- Decide how long you want your challenge to last – depending on your starting point, you might want to give yourself 6, 8 or 12 weeks to build up to your target.

- Set yourself an achievable target for each week and get walking!
- Record your daily totals in your app or step log.
- Congratulate yourself when you reach your target.

What happens when I've reached my target?

Keep walking! It takes a while for a regular activity to become a healthy habit, so just keep going and it will become second nature. You could also use some of the ideas below to help you do even more.

What tips are there for keeping up my new habit?

- **Vary your walks.** You don't have to travel to the countryside to find a rewarding walk. Towns and cities can offer interesting routes, including parks, heritage trails, canal towpaths, riverside paths, woodlands and nature reserves. For inspiration, visit www.walkni.com

- **Join a walking group.** To find a group in your area, try www.walkinginyourcommunity.com or contact your local HSC Trust physical activity coordinator (find them on www.choosetolivebetter.com). If you're ready for a longer or more strenuous walk, why not join a rambling club – find your nearest one on www.ulsterrambling.com
- **Become a walk volunteer.** If you are interested in leading a walking group in your local area, you can take part in a one-day training session to become a walk leader. Find out more about training opportunities via the Walking for Health network of local walking schemes (contact your local HSC Trust physical activity coordinator for details) or via www.walkinginyourcommunity.com
- **Take part in events and challenges.** Many walking events are free of charge – look for one near you on www.walkni.com

  You could organise or take part in a walk to raise money for your favourite charity, or challenge your friends to see who can record the most steps in a day.
- **Set a goal.** Once you're regularly meeting your target, set yourself a new goal – it could be a higher step target, or you could convert your number of steps to calories or distance and set a target for those instead.

My daily step log

Week	Daily target	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	Total for week	Daily average
Normal week										
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										

HSC Public Health Agency

CHOOSE TO LIVE BETTER

Public Health Agency
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

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