

<http://www.weather.com/outlook/health/fitness/tools/walking>

People walk for many reasons: for pleasure, to rid themselves of tensions, to find solitude, or to get from one place to another. Nearly everyone who walks regularly does so at least in part because of a conviction that it is good exercise.

Often dismissed in the past as being "too easy" to be taken seriously, walking recently has gained new respect as a means of improving physical fitness. Studies show that, when done briskly on a regular schedule, it can improve the body's ability to consume oxygen during exertion, lower the resting heart rate, reduce blood pressure, and increase the efficiency of the heart and lungs. It also helps burn excess calories.

In some weight-loss and conditioning studies, walking actually has proven to be more effective than running and other more highly-touted activities. That's because it's virtually injury-free and has the lowest dropout rate of any form of exercise. Additionally, walking appears to have a substantial psychological payoff. Beginning walkers almost invariably report that they feel better and sleep better, and that their mental outlook improves.