



**IRISH HEART
FOUNDATION**
Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke

SLÍ NA SLÁINTE

Let's Go Walking...



ABOUT THE IRISH HEART FOUNDATION

The Irish Heart Foundation is the national charity dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. Today in Ireland more people die from heart and stroke-related illnesses than from cancer, road deaths and suicide combined.

Against this background we work to bring hope, relief and a better future to families all over Ireland. We give vital patient support through our Heart and Stroke Helpline and we provide high quality public information for all.

We support pioneering medical research, campaign for improved patient care, and promote positive public health strategies.

We work in hospitals, schools and workplaces to support, educate and train people to save lives. As a charity we are dependent on the generosity of the public to continue our vital good work.

You can support our work by making a donation, giving of your time to volunteer or by learning the skills needed to save a life through our courses.

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For further information contact the Slí na Sláinte team in the Irish Heart Foundation or check out the website: www.irisheart.ie

1 ABOUT SLÍ NA SLÁINTE

Slí na Sláinte means Path to Health. Developed by the Irish Heart Foundation in 1996, it is a health promotion programme to encourage people of all ages and abilities to walk more often! The Slí na Sláinte programme includes:

Slí na Sláinte Routes

Research commissioned by the Irish Heart Foundation suggests that people who walk like to know the distance they walk, and that marking distances on a route encourages people to walk more frequently and for longer distances than the national average. Based on this information, a Slí na Sláinte route uses attractive signage at kilometer intervals on established walking routes. This allows walkers to identify the distance they have covered. Since 1996, a network of almost 170 walking routes has been developed all around the country. Slí na Sláinte routes have also been developed in 12 countries around the world. A Slí na Sláinte route can be developed in your locality by the Local Authority in partnership with the community and (optional) other appropriate commercial organisations, and become part of the approved list of Slí na Sláinte routes.

Slí@Work

The Slí concept has been further developed to suit the needs of workplaces and to enable companies or organisations create an environment that will encourage employees and customers to be physically active. Indoor Slís, virtual Slís, and Slí@Work signs encourage people to be more active throughout the day. The motivational signs are intended to inform people about the benefits of physical activity, to encourage use of stairs instead of escalators or lifts, and to motivate people to walk short distances instead of using a car or public transport.



Walking Leader Training

The Slí na Sláinte Walking Leader Training is aimed at people who wish to promote walking and lead walks in their communities or workplaces. Courses are organised at venues around the country annually — each accommodates 20 — 24 participants. The course commences on a Friday evening and concludes on a Sunday afternoon.

The course is best suited to people who are enthusiastic walkers themselves, and who:

- Have an interest in organising walking sessions, events or programmes
- Wish to set up a walking group in their locality or workplace
- Would like to develop a Slí na Sláinte route

The course consists of a mix of theory and practical units and deals with topics such as:

- Format of a walking session
- Fitness walking
- Safety issues and insurance
- Managing your group
- Planning a walking programme
- Promotion

General promotion and support

In addition to route development and leader training, the Irish Heart Foundation continuously promotes walking in Ireland through regular newsletters, national and international walking events, workshops and promotions through local and national media. In addition to this booklet (which was developed to encourage you to walk more often and enhance your walking experience) Slí na Sláinte provides ongoing support to route developers, walking leaders and walkers in a variety of other ways that includes:

World Heart Day

World Heart Day is both an international and national day of awareness of heart disease and stroke. The Irish Heart Foundation uses World Heart Day as an opportunity to highlight the health benefits of walking. World Heart Day usually takes place on the last Sunday in September. In Ireland, the Irish Heart Foundation has promoted World Heart Day as the biggest countrywide walking event with walks organised nationwide by families, community groups, walking leaders and workplaces. It offers an opportunity to raise vital funds to help the Irish Heart Foundation fight heart disease and stroke.



Slí na Sláinte Challenge

The Slí na Sláinte Time or Distance Challenge is a health promotional tool which assists people in calculating their time and distance walked and offers awards when targets are met. (See back of this booklet for more information).

Walking for Health Workshop

Walking for Health Workshops are organised at local level for community groups, clubs and workplaces. The aim of the workshops is to encourage participants to walk more often and to help them get more health benefits from their walks. The workshop highlights the main health benefits to be gained from a programme of regular walking and gives practical advice on issues such as loosening and stretching, posture, intensity, clothing and gear and sets participants a challenge to walk more often.

Slí@work

Slí@work comprises a series of motivational signs designed to promote physical activity, particularly walking. The signs inform people about the benefits of physical activity, to encourage use of stairs instead of escalators or lifts, and to motivate people to walk short distances instead of using a car or public transport.

2 ABOUT WALKING

Walking is the oldest and most natural form of physical activity and in recent years has made a massive ‘comeback’ as a leisure pursuit. Irish adults now list walking as their favourite recreational activity.

There are many reasons for this

- You don’t have to be an ‘expert’ to go walking. It appeals to people of all ages and from all walks of life
- You don’t have to splash out a fortune for special equipment — just a good pair of shoes and you’re on the road — simple!
- You are less likely to get injured walking. It’s a completely natural physical activity — our bodies were designed for it!
- You can be sociable and walk

In addition to being a popular recreational activity, walking is an effective way of improving physical fitness and enhancing health. Abundant research shows that: being active makes you feel good. It can add life to your years as well as years to your life. Regular physical activity can reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, some cancers, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Not only that, it can help control weight, help you sleep better, reduce any stress and anxiety you may have, as well as strengthen muscles and bones.

Recommendation

All adults need to accumulate moderate intensity aerobic activity for at least 30 minutes on five days a week. You can build up to 30 minutes of activity over two to three shorter sessions or do the 30 minutes, or more, all in one single session, for example 2 x 15 minutes walking to and from work or a 30 minute walk in the park in the evening. To lose weight, aim to be active for at least 60 — 75 minutes, five days a week and again this can be spread over the day and effort required is a moderate or hearty pace.

What is moderate intensity?

You'll know you are at moderate intensity when:

- Your heart is beating faster than normal. Place your hand on your chest and you'll feel it thumping
- You are breathing deeper and faster than normal but not out of breath (Note: If you can't talk comfortably, you're going too fast)
- There's a little sweat appearing on your brow but you're not sweating profusely



The main benefits claimed for walking are:

Heart and lungs

When you walk at the right intensity you give your heart, lungs and blood vessels their own special workout and you train these vital organs to work harder and more efficiently for you. Consequently, you can help prevent heart attack, stroke, lung disease and high blood pressure.

Joints

In the past, people who suffered from painful joints would never have dreamed of turning to exercise.

Now doctors have found that people who suffer joint discomfort can benefit from regular walking — because walking strengthens the muscles and ligaments which hold the joints in place. The more you build up these muscles the better your chances of eliminating joint pain.

Bones

Bones tend to be brittle at the best of times but become susceptible to injury or degeneration as you get older. Some activities (like jogging, skipping or jumping) are high-impact in nature and subject your bones to a lot of stress and strain. Walking is much kinder on your bones — as the impact is at a low level.

Muscles

Normal walking (at a relaxed pace), has the effect of strengthening and toning the muscles of the calves, thighs, ankles and feet. Fitness walking techniques such as power walking, stride walking and Nordic walking involve greater use of the upper body and are a marvellous way of toning not only the legs, but also the arms, shoulders, stomach, hips and buttocks.

Stress

Stress is a common by-product of modern-day living. There are many quick solutions often expensive, for stress, tension and anxiety on offer. But we have a solution that doesn't come in a pill or liquid form and is totally free of side-effects. Walking! Doctors have found that regular walkers are better able to cope with whatever problems modern-day living throws at them. Walkers report feeling better about themselves; being more confident, more alert and enthusiastic; feeling mentally sharper; and having better sleeping patterns.

Stroke

Did you know? Over 20% of coronary heart disease and 10% of stroke is due to physical inactivity. Regular walking is one factor that can help reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke, along with having a healthy diet, a healthy level of cholesterol and blood pressure, and not smoking.

Energy

Many people think that the less energy they have, the less physical activity they should do. But the opposite is true! Perhaps the greatest benefit fitness can bring is the feeling of vim and vigor that it instills in people of all ages. The fatigue we feel in everyday life is often a mixture of mental and physical exhaustion. Walking can alleviate both.

Calorie burn

Staying slim and trim is a delicate balance between taking in energy (in the form of food) and expending energy (in physical activity). When you walk, your body burns more calories than usual. For example, a man weighing 12 stone uses around 330 calories in a one-hour walk at a brisk pace. But walking also helps suppress the appetite. Now there's food for thought!





So put your best foot forward and start walking today and you'll quickly find, for a whole lot of reasons, that it's a step in the right direction.

3 LET'S GET STARTED



Checking up!



For the vast majority of people, increasing physical activity levels should not pose any serious health hazard, but you can never be too careful. The questions below will let you know if you should get medical advice before you get started.



Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition & recommended only medically approved physical activity? **Yes**  **No** 



Do you have chest pain brought on by physical activity? **Yes**  **No** 



Have you developed chest pain at rest in the past month? **Yes**  **No** 

Do you lose consciousness or lose your balance as a result of dizziness? **Yes**  **No** 

Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be aggravated by a programme of walking? **Yes**  **No** 

Are you currently on any form of medication (e.g. tablets, inhaler)? **Yes**  **No** 

Are you pregnant or have you been pregnant in the past three months? **Yes**  **No** 

Are you aware of any other reason against engaging in physical activity without medical approval, through your own experience or a doctor's advice ? **Yes**  **No** 

If you answered YES to one or more of the above questions, you should seek your doctor's permission before undertaking a walking programme.

Gearing up

Unlike other activities, walking does not require hi-tech, expensive equipment. To start, all you need is a good pair of walking shoes but you may consider investing in some of the following as you become more serious about your walking.

Shoes

Make sure you buy walking shoes. Many outlets will try to sell running shoes (or cross trainers) for walking but they are not ideal. Walking shoes are designed specifically to suit the mechanics of walking and:

- Will have good cushioning on the heel area. When you walk briskly your foot can impact with the ground by as much as four times your own body weight. Your shoes should provide good shock absorption to protect your heels and the joints of your ankles, knees and hips
- Will have a good outersole. Leather shoes are sturdy, stable and pretty waterproof but can be expensive. A combination of leather and mesh is more lightweight and will allow breathability and support — but will let the water in!
- Will have a spacious toe-box. As you walk, your toes spread out as they push off — the toe-box should be wide enough to allow this to happen. No part of the shoe should be catching your foot — key tip is to fit your shoes on late in the day when your feet have swollen to their maximum





Socks

Socks are important to prevent blistering.

- If you wear one pair try turning them inside out to keep the seams away from your foot
- Two light pairs are better than one — the extra layer reduces the risk of developing blisters
- There are special walking socks available in some stores (sometimes referred to as 100ml or 200ml socks) which are guaranteed to keep you blister free

Upper body clothing

When it comes to clothing the upper body, remember the 3Ls and 3Ws.

The 3 Ls

Loose, light, layers will help you move freely, and allow you to easily remove and replace items as you warm up or cool down.

The 3 Ws

Ideally, you should wear three layers of clothes:

A wicker layer

This is the layer against the skin and should be made of a wicking material which takes perspiration away from the skin to the outside of the garment. Polyester is probably best — cotton (which many people use) is actually very poor as it retains moisture — this has the effect of making you feel very cold as sweat takes warmth away from your body.

A warmth layer

A light fleece (sometimes referred to as a microfleece) is best — heavy, chunky fleeces are unpractical and uncomfortable when the body temperature rises. A water-resistant or (better still) waterproof layer. A lightweight, breathable, rainproof garment can be worn to warm up and folded into a pouch (or wrapped around the waist) when you warm up. Ideally, it should be completely waterproof — but even if it resists rain for a period it will make your walks more comfortable.

Cap and gloves

In cold weather you lose most of your body heat through your head and hands. Lightweight fleece hat and gloves will add to the comfort of your walks when there's a brrrrrr in the month!

The following gadgets may add to the pleasure you get from your walking sessions:

Heart rate monitor

A heart rate monitor will tell you how fast your heart is beating as you walk (or any other form of activity). This is important if you are serious about walking at the correct intensity.



Step counter

A step counter measures the number of steps you take with reasonable accuracy and are quite affordable. More complicated pedometers suggest they can measure your distance, speed and calorie consumption. Be careful — they really can not do this with a great deal of accuracy and may not be worth the extra costs. You can order step counters from the Irish Heart Foundation. Please call 01 668 5001 for more information.

Water bottle

A water bottle will help keep you well hydrated — this is particularly important if you are engaging in long walks, or in hot/humid weather conditions.

Waist pack

A waist pack can be useful to carry a range of items such as a snack, water bottle, mobile phone, personal first-aid kit, etc.

High visibility (Hi-Viz) vests

Strongly recommended for use if walking on busy roads with heavy traffic — especially on winter evenings or in dark conditions.

Nordic poles

The most recent innovation in fitness walking. Because of the extra effort in using these special poles properly, Nordic walking can burn as much as 40% more calories than normal walking.

Buying your walking gear

The Irish Heart Foundation sell pedometers and high-visibility vests. Give us a call on **01 668 5001** or check out our website **www.irishheart.ie**. Most sports outlets stock a wide range of appropriate clothing — but stores that specialise in athletics clothing or outdoor gear are probably your best bet.



So what's your excuse?

- **I'm too tired.** Physical activity gives you more energy.
- **I'm not the sporty type.** You don't need to be sporty to be active. Many everyday routines and tasks, such as walking to the shops, gardening, Hoovering or washing the car for 10 minutes or longer can help you build up your 30 minutes.
- **I'm too busy.** All it takes is 30 minutes... The sort of activity you need to do for your health can be included in your working day.
- **I'm too ill.** If you have a medical problem that stops you being active, talk to your doctor about which activity would suit you best.
- **I'm too unfit or overweight.** You have everything to gain and only weight to lose. Combining healthy eating with activity is far more effective for weight loss than diet alone. However unfit you feel, it's never too late to start being more active. Take it easy, build up gradually and enjoy a new you — fitter and stronger and with plenty of energy.
- **I hate exercise.** Don't confuse activity with formal exercise. You can be active without ever slipping into lycra or joining a gym. Walking is one of the best ways to get your dose of healthy activity: at least 30 minutes of brisk walking spread throughout the day in bouts of 10 minutes or more will strengthen your heart and muscles. It's easy, and you can do it anywhere, at any time, and either alone or with friends.
- **I'm too old.** It's never too late to get active. Most people become less active as they age but staying active is important throughout life. Regular activity helps maintain strong muscles and bones and allows a person to stay independent in later life.

4 LET'S GET GOING

The Irish Heart Foundation recommends that Irish adults should accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderately intensive physical activity on 5 days of the week or a total of 150 minutes over the week. A daily walk can help you achieve that guideline — but you'll need to make sure that you challenge yourself a little during each walk.

Outlined below is a format for a walking session which lasts between 30 — 50 minutes and consists of a warm-up phase, a workout section, and a cool-down stage. Each section is developed further in the pages that follow.

1. Sloosen up! (5 minutes)

Use mobility activities to loosen up your joints.

2. Stroll out! (5 – 10 minutes)

Stroll gently to raise your body temperature and heart rate.

3. Stride out! (10 – 20 minutes)

Walk at moderate intensity to gain maximum aerobic fitness benefits.

4. Stroll in! (5 – 10 minutes)

Slow the pace down again and use mobility activities to bring your body back to a physically relaxed state.

5. Stretch out! (5 minutes)

Use stretching exercises to loosen and lengthen your muscles and, thereby, help to prevent soreness/stiffness.

1. Sloosen up!

The following exercises are designed to increase blood flow to your muscles and help lubricate your joints. Repeat each exercise 10 — 16 times.

Shoulders

Slowly circle your shoulders forward — then backward.

Trunk

Spread your feet shoulder width apart, bend your knees slightly, and gently twist your trunk left and right — looking around you as you do.

Hips

Gently swing your left leg forward and backward. **(Repeat on right leg).**

Knees

Slowly raise your left heel to your bum and lower. **(Repeat on right leg).**

Ankles

Gently rotate your left ankle — drawing a large letter O with your toes. **(Repeat on right leg).**



2. Stroll out!

- Walk at a relaxed pace for 5 — 8 minutes
- You are now slowly raising your heart rate, body temperature and breathing rate
- Continue to do this until you feel your entire body is well warmed up

3. Stride out!

This is part of the session where the main aerobic fitness benefits are to be gained. Your aim is to increase the intensity of your walking to moderate intensity and stay at this level for a period of 10 to 20 minutes, depending on your level of fitness. So push on! Gradually increase the pace until you are walking briskly, and your arms are involved in the walking action. A few simple changes to your walking technique can help you to bring more muscle groups into play, improve the fitness of your heart and lungs and burn up more calories.

There are two elements that you should attend to — your posture and arm swing:

Your posture

Your head

- Lift your chin so that it is parallel to the ground
- Focus into the horizon, not downward
- Imagine a string tied to the top of the head, pulling it gently upwards!

Your shoulders

Raised, tight shoulders will cause tension in your neck, hinder your arm swing, and cause early fatigue. **So...**

- Lift them up
- Roll them back
- Drop them down into a relaxed position

Your arm swing

Involving your arms to a greater extent in your walking action involves more muscle groups and will help increase the intensity of your walking. But, in addition, your arms and legs are like teammates — so the faster your arms swing, the faster your legs will move. **Try...**

- Bending your arms to a 90° angle
- Swinging from your shoulders
- Emphasising the backswing slightly

4. Stroll in!

Gradually ease down to a relaxed stroll over a period of 5 — 10 minutes allowing your heart and lungs a chance to slow down and your body temperature to return to its original level. This is also the time to replace any layers of clothing you removed prior to, or during the Stride Out.

5. Stretch out!

The exercises that follow will stretch the muscles you used while walking. Building these stretches into your walking session will help prevent or lessen muscle stiffness which can occur after a vigorous workout, and will improve your overall flexibility — making you less prone to injury.

For all stretches, the following rules apply:

- **Do not bounce or jerk.** Slow, smooth movements are safest
- **Ease yourself to the point where you feel a mild tension.** When you reach that point, stop and hold the position for 10 —15 seconds
- **Breathe normally.** Never hold your breath as you hold the stretch
- **Repeat each exercise three times**

All over stretch!

- Clasp your hands and raise them above your head palms facing upwards.
- Gradually push your palms upwards until you feel a tension all the way along your body — from top to toe!

Instructions for stretching out



Calf stretch

- Place your left foot forward and keep both feet pointing forward
- Keep your back straight and right heel on the ground, bend the left knee slowly and lean forward until you feel a tension in the calf of the right leg
- Repeat on other leg



Hamstring stretch

- Place your left heel forward and your hands on your right thigh for support
- Slowly bend your right knee and push your bum backwards until you feel a tension in your hamstrings
- Repeat on other leg



Thigh stretch

- Stand on your left leg, with a slightly bent knee
- Lift your right heel towards your buttocks and hold the instep with your right hand
- Draw your knees close together and slowly straighten up until you feel a tension in your thigh
- Repeat on your right leg



Back stretch

- Raise your arms to shoulder level and clasp your hands with palms facing forward
- Slowly push your palms forward and lower your chin to your chest until you feel a tension along your upper back and shoulders



Deltoid stretch

- Take your right arm across your body at shoulder level — like wrapping a scarf
- Place your left hand above your right elbow joint and gently pull your arm across your chest. You should feel a tension in your right outer arm and shoulder
- Repeat on your other arm



Chest stretch

- Place your palms on your buttocks
- Gently ease your elbows backwards trying to tip them off each other behind you
- You will feel a tension in your upper chest and shoulders

Keep going!

The greatest benefits of walking come with time. The longer you continue to walk, the better you'll be for it. Sticking with it will be a challenge so it's worth introducing some fun and variety into your routine. Here are some ideas.

Keep a diary

Keeping a log of the dates and distance of your walks is a great motivator. You'll be surprised how the kilometers build up.

Do the Slí na Sláinte Challenge

Once you've started walking you'll be amazed at how addictive the challenge becomes. See page 24 for more details.

Join a group

Some people enjoy walking on

Pedometers

If you get bored with recording the number of kilometers you walk why not challenge yourself to get active using the Irish Heart Foundation's Digi-Walker pedometer and record your daily steps on a record card. Pedometers can be a great motivational tool for becoming more active. We recommend that you are active for at least 30 minutes at a moderate intensity (similar to a brisk walk) on five days of the week or more. To get fit use the pedometer to build up to at least 10,000 steps per day by walking between 30 and 60 minutes. A 30 minute brisk walk averages 4,000 steps.

Challenge yourself

Take on one of the Irish Heart Foundation's walking challenges to keep yourself motivated. You can do them on your own or as a group.



To sign up for the Time or Distance Challenge and order your record card you can log onto www.irishheart.ie/sli or call us on 01 668 5001

5 THE SLÍ NA SLÁINTE TIME OR DISTANCE CHALLENGE

There are two types of challenge that you can take:

Time Challenge

If you accumulate 1,000 minutes of walking and mark it in the record sheet overleaf will receive a specially designed Slí na Sláinte Silver Pin. Walk for 5,000 minutes and receive a Gold Pin. **Or**

Distance Challenge

If you accumulate 100km and mark it on the record sheet overleaf, you will receive a specially designed Silver Slí Pin. Walk for 500km and a Gold Pin is your reward.

How long will it take to complete the Slí Challenge?

If you walk 3km (or 30 minutes of brisk walking) at least 5 days or more a week — you should earn your silver pin in about 6 weeks. To go for gold — you set the pace...so it's up to you!

How far do I need to walk each day?

For best health benefits, you need to walk at moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. You can accumulate the 30 minutes or more in two or three shorter sessions.

How far will I walk in 30 minutes?

It takes on average 12 minutes 30 seconds to walk 1km, a brisk walker will do it in 10 minutes. You should be able to walk to walk 3kms in 30 — 40 minutes, depending on your pace.

6 THE WALK OR STEP CHALLENGE

Take up the Walk or Step challenge on your own or with a group of friends over 4 weeks any time that suits you. Doing this challenge will make you more aware of the amount of activity you do and just how much you need to enjoy the positive benefits for your health and wellbeing.

Walk challenge

Your goal is at least 30 minutes of walking at a brisk pace five days a week or about 150 minutes over the week for 4 consecutive weeks. The Walk challenge can be part of your travel to and from work or to the shops. It's up to you how you accumulate the 150 minutes. You don't have to do your daily walking all at once, consider taking 10 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes over lunchtime and the rest later in the day. In this way you'll be surprised how many steps you clock up.

Step challenge

Using a pedometer aim to build up to 10,000 steps per day for good health. Walking 10,000 steps includes not only brisk walking but also regular routine activities from general household chores to walking to the photocopier in work. Many people, however, only take between 3,000 and 5,000 steps a day. How many do you think you take?



Doing the challenge

Record the number of steps you take daily and progress gradually towards achieving 10,000 steps by adding 300 — 500 steps each day. If you are inactive at the moment (less than 3,000 steps a day), it will take you at least 3 weeks to reach the 10,000 target. If you are fairly active (more than 7,000 steps a day) you will achieve your target in one week.

Some tips on clocking up those steps

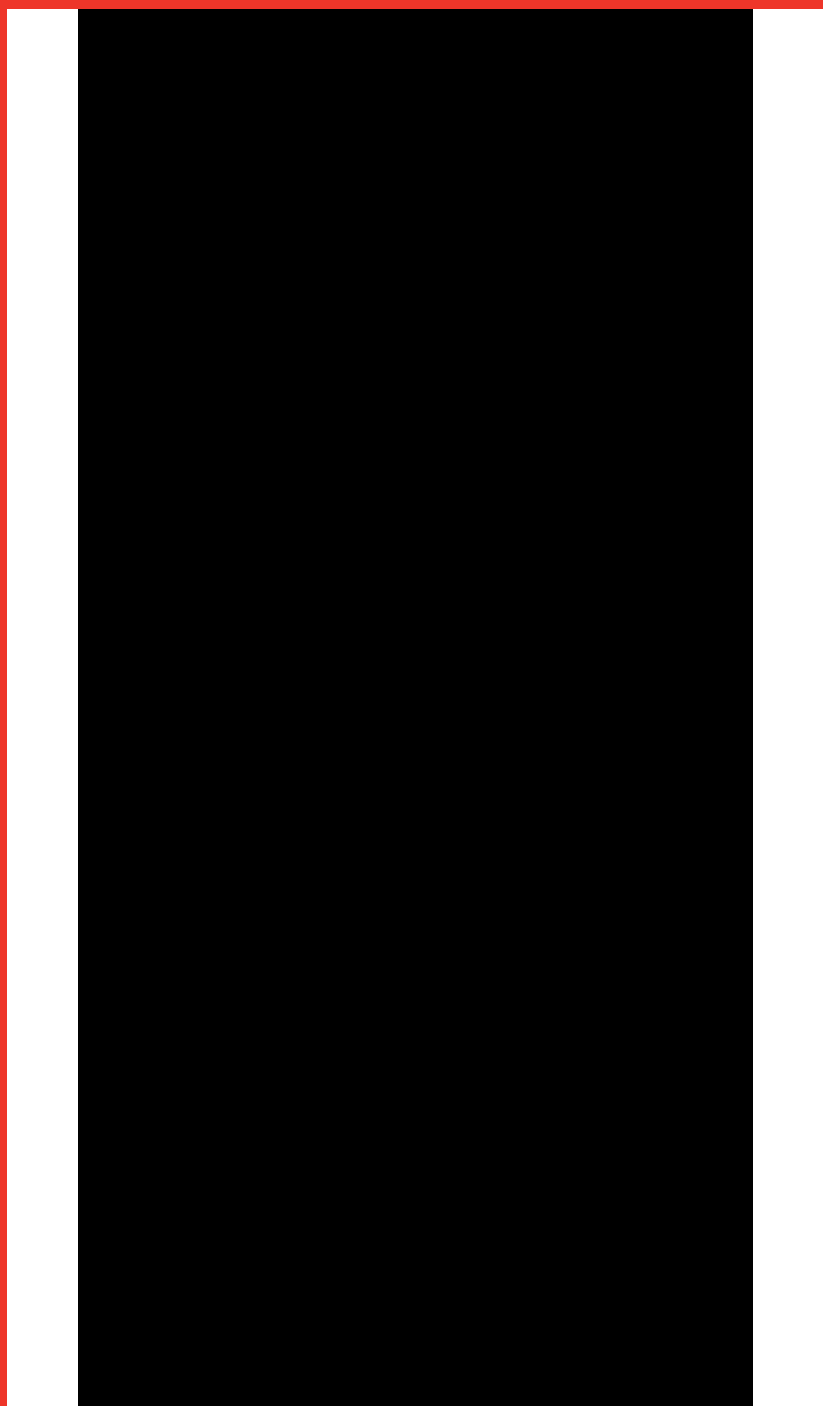
- Getting up and pottering about while you're on the phone
- Using bathrooms, photocopiers or water stations that are further away
- Climbing the stairs instead of standing in the lift
- Walking to work or parking your car at the farthest end of the car park
- Taking a walk during your lunch hour
- Doing a stepabout during the ad break on TV
- Recreational or sporting activities such as dancing, walking or golfing
- General chores such as gardening, putting out the bins, etc.
- Buy a step counter to record and help increase your daily walking
- If you have children, walk them to and from school
- Get a walking partner — and do the Challenge together
- Join a walking club to help get you motivated and meet new people

If you have a health problem or are worried about any aspect of your health, check with your GP before undertaking our walking challenges.

You can order our Walk or Step Challenge card by contacting 01 668 5001

PLEASE DETACH HERE, PLACE IN AN ENVELOPE AND RETURN TO THE ADDRESS BELOW

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