



SUMTER COUNTY ACTIVE LIFESTYLES

Volunteer Walk Leader Manual

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Sumter County Active Lifestyles
155 Haynsworth Street
Sumter, SC 29150
Phone 803.774.3860 • Fax 803.436.2400

Developed by Jean Butel

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Introduction

Walking groups are strongly recommended to promote physical activity (1). Those participating in walking groups are likely to report more walking than those not in walking groups. Walk group leaders are important in the success of a walking program. Volunteer walk leaders provide knowledge, understanding of the community, and play an important role in keeping walking groups going. By being a walk leader, you are filling an important and critical role and are greatly appreciated.

Health Benefits of Walking

- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Helps maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce body fat.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and increases feelings of well-being.
- Can help reduce blood pressure.
- Has the lowest rate of injury than any other form of exercise.

Why walk? Physical inactivity is the second leading actual cause of death in the United States (2). Physical inactivity has been called the ‘silent killer’ of our time. Over half of the adults in the United States are not getting enough exercise to benefit their health (3).

Walking is a good way to get inactive people to exercise. It is a natural activity that costs little and is easier to start and continue than other activities. Walking requires no special equipment, is available to most people, and has a low risk of injury. Walking groups give the health benefits of physical activity with the added bonus of being part of a group.

Walking groups provide social support. Social support is an important part of meeting exercise goals. One study shows that 80% of those who met their walking goals had social support (4). Having people around who enjoy walking can be motivating and provide accountability so that everyone in the group can meet their walking goals.

Health benefits of walking at a brisk pace can be seen with as little as 30 minutes a day, 5 or more days a week. Greater benefits are achieved with longer time spent walking (greater weight loss is seen with 60 minutes a day, 5 or more days a week). The walking does not have to be done all at once. Ten minutes of exercise at different times throughout the day can also provide health benefits. Most group walks are about one hour in length.

What the volunteer walk leader manual provides

This manual was created to help you start a walking group and give you ideas to make your walking group better.

This manual contains information and tools you will want to have to be a successful volunteer walk leader. You may not be able to use all the information provided in this manual, but the tools and suggestions will help you to create and maintain an enjoyable walking group. The manual is designed to help you prepare, plan, and provide a walking program that meets your needs and those of your walking group members. The manual includes:

- a section on planning
- how to recruit walkers
- what to do before each walk
- what to do while on the walk
- how to stay motivated
- information on health and safety



It is the intent of this manual to provide relevant and useful information to assist walk leaders and enhance the walk leader experience.

The role of a walk leader

Volunteering can bring many opportunities to you as an individual, including becoming involved in bringing about social change. Here are some walk leader benefits:

- ☆ gaining a sense of achievement from encouraging and supporting others
- ☆ making a valuable contribution to the community
- ☆ meeting new people
- ☆ keeping active and fit
- ☆ helping others be more active and fit
- ☆ having an opportunity to be outdoors
- ☆ using skills you already have and learning new ones
- ☆ being part of a group

By becoming a volunteer walk leader, you can make a difference in the walkers' lives and your own. The walks are aimed at people who are doing very little or no exercise at the moment but would like to become more active, as well as those who would like to improve their fitness in general. The walks are not competitive; the groups are encouraged to walk at their own comfortable brisk pace, and this may vary from person to person. As well as promoting the physical and mental benefits of walking, walking groups also promote the availability of walking trails and paths in the community. By encouraging walking, we can promote healthier lifestyles that are better for individuals and the community.

What does a walk leader do?

A walk leader is a person who the walking group members look to for guidance and encouragement. Walk leaders plan the walking route, set the times and days for the walks, recruit walking group members, lead the walks, and keep track of the number of walkers.

Providing information on the condition of the walking routes, as well as keeping track of the number of walks led per month and the number of walkers participating, is very helpful to the community. This information helps promote walking to community leaders and shows the benefits of investing in safe and accessible walking routes.

A good walk leader is someone who:

- is easy to talk to
- is positive and encouraging
- is reliable and on time
- has a warm approach and is welcoming
- shows knowledge of walking from easy walks to more difficult walks
- is familiar with routes and alternatives
- makes the walk fun
- ensures the route is safe
- keeps track of the number of walkers
- lets program coordinator know of problems

Planning

Planning is an essential part of a successful walking group. Planning looks at goals and then develops walking routes and times to support these groups.

Setting goals

As a volunteer walk leader, you need to have a goal for the walking group. This goal should take into account what *you* want from the walking group as well as the group's members. Establishing a target and reaching it can give you a sense of achievement and confidence and help you to go on setting further goals. Some questions to ask yourself first and then those in the walking group could be:

It is important to know what you want as a walk leader.

Knowing what the walking group goals are will help in planning the route, establishing a time, and recruiting walking group members.

How fast is the group going to walk?

Does the group want to socialize after the walk?

How often will the group walk?

How long will the walk last?

Where will the group walk? (Is this going to be a neighborhood walking group, a workplace walking group, a group that walks on a track, a city walking route or a nature trail?)

Will the group include babies in strollers?

Will the group include pets on leashes?

Any other question(s) that help define the walking group goals.

Where to walk

Do you want to walk on an established walking route or trail, or do you want to develop your own route? The goals of the walking group will help in choosing the best walking route.



Keep the route simple – difficult routes can be discouraging. **Make it easy to follow** – an existing trail or marked route is easiest, but simple written directions can work also.

Consider your walking group when planning - it is important to walk the route at a specific pace so you will know the length of the route and the time it will take to walk the route. This will also help new participants of the walking group know the pace and length of the walk.

The chart on the right is only a guide to help you in planning your route.

WALKING SPEED (miles per hour)	TIME		
	15 minutes	30 minutes	45 minutes
SLOW (2 miles per hour)	0.5 miles	1.0 miles	1.5 miles
MEDIUM (3 miles per hour)	0.75 miles	1.5 miles	2.25 miles
FAST (4 miles per hour)	1 mile	2 miles	3 miles

NOTE: This information should only be used as a guide. Walking speed may vary among individuals of different ages, abilities, leg length, and levels of fitness.

Other things to consider:

Look at the Sumter County Active Lifestyles walking map for routes that you can use!

- ◆ Accessibility – The route needs to have a starting point that all members can get to by foot, bicycle, public transportation, or car.
- ◆ Appeal – Consider the physical environment (shade, interesting scenery, historical area, etc.)
- ◆ Traffic – Avoid busy roads. Look for quieter streets and locations. If unavoidable, make sure that crossing a busy street is safe and well marked.
- ◆ Safe surroundings – Keep the route so that you don't walk through narrow alleys and other areas where people may feel unsafe.
- ◆ Level of difficulty – Try to match the route to the fitness level of the group. Try to have hills or inclines in the middle of the walk so that the participants are warmed up before the hill and have a chance to cool down afterward.
- ◆ Please use the 'Walk Route Checklist' in the Sample Forms section.

When to walk

Time of day:

- ◆ Your walking group goals can help you in picking a time to have the walks.
- ◆ If it is a workplace walking group, ask interested coworkers if it would be better to walk before or after work or maybe during lunch break.
- ◆ Consider the time of the year. The walk time may need to be at cooler times of the day during the summer. During the winter, you will need to consider the amount of daylight if your walks are early in the morning or later in the evening.
- ◆ Choose a time that you can regularly commit to.
- ◆ Think about what time of day your walking group members would normally walk for fitness. Many people that like to walk prefer to walk at either the beginning or end of the day and during daylight hours.
- ◆ If your walking group likes to socialize, you may want to finish your walk at a café or a park. Think of what is available and the times they are open.

Days of the week:

- ◆ Think of how many days a week your group is going to walk and which days those will be.
- ◆ Pick days that you can commit to.
- ◆ If the group is going to walk on the weekends, find out if Saturday or Sunday would be best.



Recruiting Walkers

Starting a walking group doesn't require much. Simply spread the word and get organized. Soon you'll be walking toward better health!

What do walking groups offer participants?

- ☆ They provide an opportunity for social contact which can motivate people to walk regularly.
- ☆ They can overcome the fear barrier of walking alone.
- ☆ They can help people who are insecure or lack confidence to take action.
- ☆ Walk leaders can provide support, useful information, and advice on walking.
- ☆ They provide accountability. Many people will walk if they know that someone is waiting for them.
- ☆ They help people meet their walking goals and make further goals.

Word of mouth

- ☛ Talk to family members, friends, neighbors, members of your congregation, and coworkers. You might have people around you who are ready to start walking – and hold each other accountable for regular exercise.
- ☛ Ask interested walkers to spread the word and help you recruit. Use the group's momentum to get more walkers.

Spread the word

- ↪ Create a flyer to announce your walking group. Include time, location, and a telephone number if you don't mind taking calls.
- ↪ Post your flyer:
 - in the break room at your work
 - on your place of worship's bulletin board
 - at a local shop (This might be a good idea if your planning on finishing your walk at the shop.)
 - at a health club
 - at senior centers
 - at community centers
- ↪ Have flyers on hand if people ask you about the group when you are out and leading walks.
- ↪ Think about putting a brief article in a local club or school newsletter.
- ↪ Recruit walkers through the SCAL quarterly newsletter.
- ↪ Get ideas from your group members.
- ↪ Consider posting your walking group schedule on the Sumter Cycling, Hiking and Adventure Club website: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Sumter-Cycling-Hiking-Adventure-Club/>
- ↪ Plan an organizational meeting
 - ◆ Consider holding a meeting to kick off the start of your group. Decide when and where you want to have the meeting. Think about meeting at a public location such as the library, community center, or your church. That way you don't have to invite strangers into your home.
 - ◆ Ask guests to provide their name, address, telephone number, and email address so you can contact them.
 - ◆ Start small – discuss routes, times, goals of the group, speed of the walks, and distance of the walks.
 - ◆ Ask the guests what motivates and inspires them to walk.

Before Each Walk

Just as each day is a new start, each walk is a new opportunity

It is a good idea to do the following before the walk starts:

- ◆ Try to get to the walk starting point early enough to meet walkers as they arrive.
- ◆ Greet all walkers as they arrive and give them your name if they are new.
- ◆ Introduce new walkers to the group.
- ◆ Let people know what to expect. Let them know the length of the walk and any alternate routes if available.
- ◆ Don't cancel – if you can't be there let the walkers know ahead of time or schedule a substitute. Make sure the substitute knows the route and the role and responsibilities of a walk leader.
- ◆ Record the number of walkers present.
- ◆ Remind walkers about correct clothing and footwear and to lock their cars.
- ◆ Make sure someone in the walking group has a cell phone for emergencies.
- ◆ Have emergency contact numbers for all walkers.



New walkers

When you have a new walker to the group it is a good idea to take a few minutes to go over the following checklist with them to ensure a safe and enjoyable walk.

- ❖ **Ask about their current activity level** – and inform the person of the type of walk you will be doing that day– whether it is easy, moderate, or difficult.
- ❖ **Provide information** – Let the walker know about resources available (e.g. the walking guide, websites, and other resources). Have copies of the Barriers to Physical Activity and Suggestions for Overcoming Barriers available (see Sample Forms).
- ❖ **Go over walk route** – inform the walker of the route and about how long it will take.
- ❖ **Emergency contact information** – get emergency contact details from new members
- ❖ **Introduce them to the group** – making new walkers feel welcome will enhance their walking experience.

New walkers may feel out of place, so it is a good idea to make them feel welcome and wanted.

Walking

Walking is something most people do on a daily basis. It is a natural activity that most people can perform with confidence. There are a few things to keep in mind when walking for fitness that will make the experience more enjoyable and reduce risk of injury. This section gives tips for fitness walking and ideas to keep walkers motivated while on the walk.

Good walking posture and movement

A good walking posture will help walkers reduce their chance of injury, to breathe better while walking, and enable them to move at a better pace. The movement of our limbs has a large impact on our walking pace. First, we will look at different parts of the body and how they are positioned while walking. Next we will look at the movement of our limbs. Finally, we will put all of them together to achieve a good walking posture and movement.

Many of us don't think about our posture while walking. These tips can help improve our walking posture and our posture overall.

☆ An easy way to get correct body posture

Think of lifting the bottom rib off of the top of the hip.

This pulls the tummy in and shifts the tailbone in and down.

The result is a long spine, an open chest, and shoulders down and back... good body posture.

Posture

Head

The head should be centered with the ears directly over the shoulders. The chin should be parallel with the ground and the eyes looking ahead about 6 to 8 feet.

Shoulders

The shoulders should be relaxed and down and back. This creates some space between the ears and the shoulders. Have them roll their shoulders up to their ears and then slide the shoulder blades down the spine. This way they can feel the correct shoulder posture.

Chest

The chest should be lifted and open.

..Movement

..Arms

The arm swing should be natural and comfortable. The forward swing should be relaxed and close to the center of the body.

..Legs

The length of each stride should be comfortable for the walker. Stride length will vary between individuals. The length of the leg, hamstring tightness, and rotation of the hips all factor into the length of a person's stride.

..Foot placement

With each step, the heel should touch the ground first. The weight then rolls forward to the ball of the foot, lifting the heel off the ground. The middle toes should be in line with the shin bone to ensure proper forward motion.

..Putting it all together

Walking is a natural activity. Demonstrating proper walking technique is all most people will need to achieve good walking form. Simple reminders and setting a good example of walking form when walkers begin to tire will help them maintain good walking form.

While it's true that those with longer legs cover more ground with each stride, it is not necessary to increase the length of the stride to walk faster. The faster the rear leg is brought forward, the faster the rate of walking will be. Walkers should be encouraged to maintain a comfortable stride length.

Walking Basics

The walk has different sections: warming up, stretching, pace walking, and cooling down. Another element of group walking is socializing. Putting all these portions together makes for a successful walking group. Warming up, stretching, and cooling down are often overlooked when time is short, but they don't take long and can help prevent injury among walkers.

..A successful walking group combines all the basics of walking.

Warming up

A warm-up includes 5 to 10 minutes of slow walking. This will:

- increase heart rate
- increase breathing rate
- get blood flowing (especially to the leg muscles)
- increase body temperature so the muscles are easier to stretch

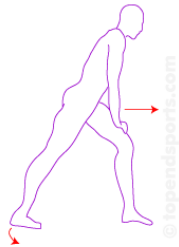
Stretching

Stretching increases flexibility, reduces muscle tension, and reduces the risk of muscle or tendon injuries. Stretches should be held to the point of gentle tension for 15 to 20 seconds with no bouncing. The following stretches are good for walking

Warmed muscles are more easily stretched than cold muscles. Stretching after warming up reduces the risk of tearing or straining muscles.

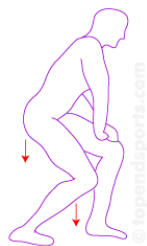
Standing calf stretch

Stand with both feet pointing straight ahead, step one leg back, and bend the front knee. Rest the hands gently on the front thigh. Press the back heel into the ground and push backward until a gentle stretch is felt in the lower back and calf muscle. Remember to keep the back straight and head lifted. Hold for 20 seconds and repeat with other leg.



Lower calf stretch

Stand with both feet pointing straight ahead, step one leg back slightly, and bend both knees. Rest the hands gently on the front thigh. Push both heels into the ground, placing more pressure on the back leg. Drop the hips slightly towards the ground. The stretch should be felt in the lower calf (Achilles tendon area). Remember to keep the back straight and head lifted. Hold for 20 seconds and repeat with other leg.



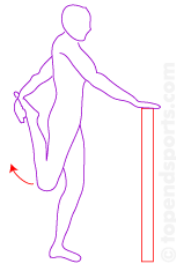
Hip stretch

Stand with both feet pointing straight ahead, step one leg back, and bend the front knee. Place both hands on the front thigh, making sure there is no pressure on the knee joint. Press the hips forward while keeping the back knee straight. Keep the back straight. This stretch will be felt in front of the hip and a little bit down the front of the thigh. Hold for 20 seconds and repeat with other leg.



Quadriceps stretch

Holding onto a tree, fence, or wall for support, raise one leg and grab the ankle with the opposite hand. Keep the standing knee bent; pull the ankle towards the bottom. Try to gently straighten the standing leg until a gentle stretch is felt in the front of the thigh of the bent leg. Remember to keep the back straight and head lifted. Hold for 20 seconds and repeat with other leg.



Standing hamstring stretch

Stand with both feet pointing forward in front of a low bench or step. Place one heel onto the bench or step and straighten both knees. Keep the back straight and chest lifted and press the hips and chest forward until a gentle stretch is felt in the back of the thigh or behind the knee. Remember to keep the back straight and head lifted. Hold for 20 seconds and repeat with other leg.

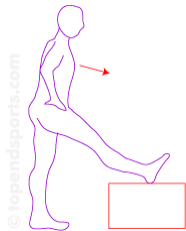


Photo source: Topendsports, www.topendsports.com

Stretching tips:

- ✪ Keep a gentle pressure while holding a stretch. DO NOT bounce, as this can damage muscles and tendons.
- ✪ Never force a stretch, only stretch to the point of gentle tension.
- ✪ Keep a soft bend in the knee of the standing leg. Hyper-extending the knee can cause injury.

Setting the pace

Once the group has warmed up and stretched, it is time to set the pace. Before you start, remind the group of the walking pace and that it is not a competition. The pace you set for the walk should be a pace the whole group can maintain. As you are walking, some things to remember are:

The talk test:

The talk test is a simple way of measuring intensity level.

- *Light intensity* level is when a person can sing while walking.
- *Moderate intensity* is when a person can carry on a conversation comfortably.
- *Vigorous intensity* is when a person can't carry on a conversation and can only say a few words at a time.

Members of the walking group should be working at a *moderate* level of intensity.

- ◆ Walk in the middle of the group. This allows you to see how everyone is doing and to look for those who might be having problems.
- ◆ Adjust the speed of the walk (either faster or slower) depending on how the group is doing.
- ◆ The walkers should be breathing a little faster than normal but still be able to talk easily.
- ◆ Remind walkers of short cuts or alternate routes and to let you know if they are leaving the group during the walk.
- ◆ Look for walkers who might be having problems (See Health and Safety section)
- ◆ Be friendly and talk to walkers on the way.
- ◆ Remind walkers to drink water, especially during hot weather.
- ◆ Have fun!

Cooling down

The cooling down part of the walk should last 5 to 10 minutes. Cooling down includes slower-paced walking and a repeat of the gentle stretches performed earlier in the walk. Cooling down helps the body by:

- ☆ returning body temperature back to normal
- ☆ preventing pooling of blood in the legs, which can cause dizziness and fainting.
- ☆ helping to reduce muscle stiffness and soreness.
- ☆ stretching the muscles and helping to reduce injury

Socializing

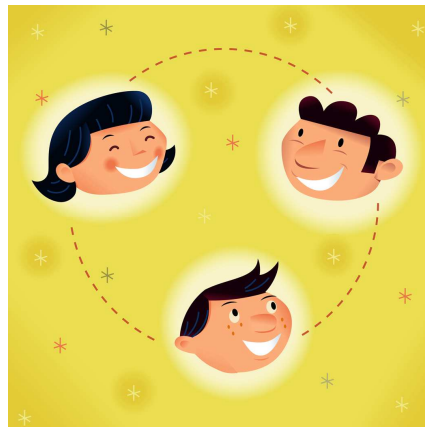
Socializing at the end of the walk makes people feel welcome and want to come back.

Socializing at the end of the walk not only gives walkers a chance to interact, but also provides a closing for the walk. This way, you can check that all walkers have returned and that they are feeling well. It gives you an opportunity to thank the walkers for coming and encourage them to come back and bring a friend. It also gives a sense of belonging to the group and provides an opportunity for walkers to relax with each other.

At the end of the walk, remember to:

- make sure everyone has returned and is feeling okay.
- mention the time and date of the next walk.
- allow time for walkers to ask you questions or just to talk to you.
- thank people for coming.
- invite people to stay for a drink (if applicable)

By including the above elements, you can go a long way in ensuring that the walk is enjoyable and invigorating for all participants. A successful walk is one that meets the goals of the walking group in a fun and supportive environment.



Overcoming Barriers

There are many reasons that people do not get enough physical activity and just getting started is difficult for many people. The barriers to becoming and staying active vary from person to person. Just as the barriers vary between individuals, so do the ways to overcome these barriers. This section explores some of these barriers and gives suggestions for dealing with the barriers people experience. Remember: what works for one person may not work for the next.

Walking with others as part of a group can be a good way to motivate people to become more physically active. Yet, you may have some people approach you wanting to be a part of the group but have a lack of motivation to commit to attending. To help you assist these potential walkers, there is a quiz in the Sample Forms (*Barriers to Physical Activity Quiz*). This quiz helps people find out what types of barriers are preventing them from being more active. The quiz is self-administered, so people can take it at their leisure. Included in the Sample Forms is a handout (*Suggestions for Overcoming Physical Activity Barriers*), to assist these people in finding ways to make physical activity part of their lives (5). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the top 10 reasons people cite for not getting physical activity are:

Barriers to physical activity vary from person to person, and ways to overcome these barriers are different between people, as well.

not enough time

exercising is inconvenient

lack of self-motivation

do not enjoy exercising

exercise is boring

lack of confidence in their ability to be physically active

fear of being injured or have been injured recently

lack of self-management skills, such as the ability to set personal goals, monitor progress, or reward progress toward such goals

lack of encouragement, support, or companionship from family and friends

do not have parks, sidewalks, bicycle trails, or safe and pleasant walking paths convenient to their homes or offices



Walking groups are more than a bunch of people walking at the same time in the same location. They provide support, accountability, and encouragement. These traits can help people overcome barriers to physical activity and help them live healthier lives. Some of the ways walking groups help overcome these barriers are:

- provide a set time and place to exercise
- knowing that someone is expecting them to walk helps with self motivation
- provide companionship and makes the time spent exercising go faster
- learn walking techniques
- develop skills and knowledge of walking for fitness and injury prevention
- share group goals that support their own personal goals
- get encouragement from other walkers and walk leader
- being around people who enjoy walking
- walking is a low-risk activity
- walking with a group can reduce safety concerns

Giving praise, encouragement, and more praise goes a long way in helping people develop self confidence in their ability to be physically active. Simple statements like, Your pace is really good today and we are over halfway through the walk!keep it up! and You're doing great!are good ways to build walking esteem.

Staying Motivated

Keeping the group motivated to continue walking can be a challenge once the novelty of the group wears off. Fortunately there are ways to stay motivated. Keeping a positive attitude, having variety and understanding that lapses occur are some ways to keep the group going. This section will look at each of these strategies and help your group keep walking!

Keeping a positive attitude

A walker leader's positive attitude is reflected by the positive feeling of the walking group. Have fun!

There will be days when things don't go right. Your car doesn't start, the kids were fighting, you have a lot of things to do and places to be, you didn't finish what you wanted to get done... the list goes on and on. It is important to remember we all have bad days; it is a part of life. As a walk leader, it is also important to let all that is bothering you go as you get to your walking starting point. As a leader, your mood can influence the mood for the entire walk. Coming to the walk with an upbeat attitude goes a long way in setting the mood for the walking group. Make it fun!

Other ways to maintain a positive walking group are to:

- ☆ Build self-confidence in individuals and the group by allowing other members to help with planning and leading the group.
- ☆ Provide encouragement to new and established members of the group. Sometimes it is easy to take the 'tried and true' members for granted, but everyone needs reinforcement every now and then.
- ☆ Use the social support of the walking members to help you and the group. Sometimes just seeing a smiling face can lighten a day.
- ☆ Discover the strengths of the group and develop them to keep the group on track.
- ☆ Avoid gossiping during the walk. Set the right example.

Have variety

Ask members of the group for ideas to make the walks more motivating.

They say variety is the spice of life. Variety can enhance motivation. Doing something different can add interest to the group and keep everyone walking. Once your group's walking routine is established, look for ways to enhance

motivation. You might want to choose a name for your group, design a logo, enter a charity walking event as a group, or re-look at your group goals and increase walking time or pace. By asking the group for ideas, they become part of the process and have some ownership of the group.

Some motivational activities might include:

- ◆ inviting a guest speaker to discuss health and fitness
- ◆ setting a time to share stories on how walking affects your physical and mental health
- ◆ celebrating successes of the group
- ◆ welcoming new members
- ◆ having a scavenger hunt
- ◆ planning for a walk on a nature trail



Again, it is a good idea to ask the group what sorts of activities would inspire and motivate them. Have them make the activities happen. Another good motivator is to remember the camaraderie you experience in a walking group and the group's shared fitness success.

Plan for Lapses

Lapses will happen.

A lapse lasts for a week or so. **A relapse** lasts for two weeks or longer.

It could be the busyness of the holidays, bad weather, or vacations, but there will be times when the group will not be able to get together. This is to be expected, and planning for these lapses will help in preventing relapses. The greatest threat for a relapse is believing that it won't happen. It *will*

happen, and planning for it helps get the group back on track.

Think...

about some situations where the group might be tempted to stop walking, even if it is only for a week. Some situations could be:



- holidays
- vacations
- hot or cold weather
- school breaks

Talk...

these situations over with the group *before* they happen and see how you can plan around them.

- Can you change the time you walk?
- Can you reschedule?
- Is the group able to walk on a different day of the week?

Revisit the handout *Overcoming Barriers to Physical Activity*

The handout might give the group some ideas that they had forgotten or give some needed incentive.

Another idea is to plan...

for a break in walking. It is important if the group decides to take a break that it is planned and a time and date for starting back up is in place before the break begins. Ensure that all members are committed to starting back up and realize the importance of maintaining regular physical activity.

When relapses happen, it is important to get the group back walking together as soon as possible. Think of the progress the group made, the fun you had, and the health benefits you all received.

Problem situations

Sometimes situations occur that can lessen the enjoyment of the group's walk, and they can be difficult to handle. Three common problems are difficult people, gossip, and mismatched participants. There are many ways to deal with these problems, and the following are suggestions that may help.

Difficult people

Sometimes you will find people who are unhappy about some of the walk arrangements and who complain and disrupt the group. Don't feel bad, but be clear that it is your walk and if they are not happy, they can leave the group. It helps to be clear about the goals of the group so people can know what to expect.

Gossip

The best way to stop gossip is to prevent it. Not gossiping and keeping the conversation during the walk positive sets a good example for other walkers to follow. If someone starts to gossip, some ideas to stop it are:

- ◆ If someone begins to repeat a story about someone else, politely say that you would prefer to talk about that person when they are present.
- ◆ Listen politely (without any comment), and change the subject as soon as possible—do not repeat the information to anyone else.
- ◆ If someone confides personal information to you, keep it to yourself.

Mismatched participants

There may be someone who is unable to keep up with the group. This could be someone who is new to walking and does not understand what brisk walking entails, or it could be someone who wants to walk at a slower pace than the rest of the group. This can be difficult to handle, as we do not want to discourage walkers. At the same time, though, you want to meet the walking pace of the group. Again, there are many ways to handle this situation, and the following are some ideas that may help.

- ◆ Let all new walkers know what the walking pace will be for the day's walk. This is good for new walkers and for regular walkers, since it prepares everyone for the walk.
- ◆ If someone is new to fitness walking, give them a short demonstration of the walking pace.
- ◆ If you find someone can't keep up and is seriously delaying the group, discuss this discreetly with the person and tactfully suggest they might like to take a shortcut to the finish, if possible.

- ◆ See if a regular walker would stay with the walker.
- ◆ If the walking route is not too complicated, give them directions (written if possible) and see if they would like to complete the walk at their own pace. NOTE: Do not let them walk on their own if health or safety is a concern (see Section 8). Be sure to go back and check on them after the walk is completed.
- ◆ Ask a regular walker to go ahead with the group and you stay behind.
- ◆ After the walk, suggest other groups that are better matched for their pace, and encourage them to continue walking.

Dealing with problem situations is not easy, but dealing with the problems as they happen may reduce their impact. Remember to smile and keep the walk as enjoyable as possible. Your attitude can go a long way in ensuring that the walk is enjoyable and invigorating for all participants. It is good to keep in mind the goals of the group to provide a flexible and supportive environment for all.



Health and Safety

Walking is very safe for most people. It is a low-risk activity but being aware of health and safety concerns will help reduce the chance of injury even more. It is a good idea for walk leaders to know what to do in case something happens and things to watch for to keep the walk as safe and enjoyable as possible.

Health screening



Physical activity is safe for most people, and walking is a low-risk activity. It reduces health problems associated with a sedentary lifestyle and has many benefits. Still, there are some people who should check with their doctor before changing their amount of physical activity. As a walk leader, it is important to know that the walkers in your group are able to safely start walking or increase their walking. People who have the following should talk with their doctor before starting a walking program:

Walking is a low-risk activity, but there are some people who should check with their doctor before starting a walking program.

- heart trouble
- chest pain when doing physical activity
- episodes of chest pain during the last month when not doing physical activity
- dizziness that causes them to lose their balance or consciousness
- joint or bone problems worsened by physical activity
- uncontrolled high blood pressure
- other health problems that might keep them from starting a walking program



_Sun Protection

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States. Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays appears to be the most important environmental factor involved with developing skin cancer. During the summer months, UV radiation tends to be greater.

During the walk, regular use of the following will help prevent skin cancer:

- finding a shady walking route, especially if you're walking during midday hours (10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.). This is when UV rays are strongest and do the most damage
- using clothing to protect exposed skin
- wearing a hat with a wide brim to shade the face, head, ears, and neck
- wearing sun glasses that block as close to 100% of both UVA and UVB rays as possible
- rubbing on sunscreen with sun protective factor (SPF) 15 or higher

_Clothing and footwear

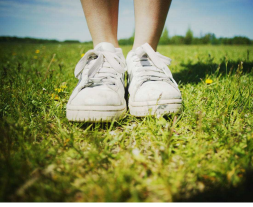
_Clothing

Walking does not require special clothing, but here are helpful ideas to make the walk more comfortable:

- Wear clothing that is lightweight and doesn't restrict movement.
- On cool days, wear several layers so that when you start to warm up you are able to remove the outer layers (e.g. a jacket can be taken off and tied around the waist; light gloves and a stocking cap that can be placed in a pocket).
- Wear a rain jacket or use an umbrella on rainy days.
- Wear a hat and light, breathable clothing for hot weather.
- Use a backpack or fanny pack to carry identification, cell phone, water, etc.
- Wear socks that fit well to help prevent blisters. Socks should not bunch up. Socks that help take moisture away from the skin will also help prevent blisters.

Footwear

Shoes that fit comfortably and allow the foot to move easily are the most important equipment for walking. Choose shoes that are comfortable, light-weight yet sturdy, and don't give you blisters.



When choosing walking shoes:

- 1) Look for a low, supportive heel that rounds in. A thick heel or one that flairs out will cause your foot to slap down rather than roll. This slows down forward momentum and increases the chance of sore shins.
- 2) A walker's foot hits heel first and then rolls gradually from heel-to-toe. So, you will need a flexible sole and more bend in the toe than a runner. You should be able to twist and bend the toe area.
- 3) Next, look for a shoe that is lightweight and breathable. The last thing you want is a clunky heavy leather walking shoe.
- 4) The most important thing, of course, is a shoe that fits properly. Be sure your foot has enough room in the toe box. There should be a thumbnail's width (or about a half inch) between your toes and the end of the shoe. The shoe should be wide enough in the toe that your toes can move freely. Your heel should not slip, and the shoe should not pinch or bind, especially across the arch or ball of your foot.
- 5) Go shoe shopping at the end of the day or after your walk, when your feet may be slightly swollen. Also, be sure to wear the same socks you will be wearing during your walks. This can make a huge difference in how the shoe fits. Try on both shoes. Your feet may not be the same size.
- 6) Do not shop when you are in a hurry. Be sure to walk around the store for a few minutes on a hard surface. If the store has an objection to this, find another store. It is worth the effort to find the right shoe for you and spending a few extra dollars.
- 7) Wear your shoes in the house for a few days to try them out. Don't venture outdoors until you are sure the shoes are going to work for you. (If the shoes are not going to work out, you will want to exchange them before scuffing them up outside.)
- 8) Keep track of how many miles you have put on your shoes, and replace them every 300 to 600 miles. (If you are wearing very lightweight shoes, are overweight, or are hard on your shoes, stay toward the low end on mileage.) To extend the life of your shoes, be sure to wear them only for your walks. Also, rotating two pair of shoes will give them time to "bounce back" between walks.

Source: <http://www.thewalkingsite.com/shoes.html>

Walking in the heat

To protect your health when temperatures are extremely high, remember to keep cool and use common sense. The following tips from the CDC (6) are important:

Walking time

Schedule the walks for morning and evening hours. Try to plan the route so there are a lot of shady areas to your body's thermostat a chance to recover.

Slow the Pace

Slow down the pace of the walk. Start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. Look for signs of distress among the walkers. Let them know that if the walk makes their heart pound and leaves them gasping for breath, they are to STOP all activity and let you know. If this happens, get them into a cool area or at least into the shade and rest, especially if they become lightheaded, confused, weak, or faint.

Drink Plenty of Water

During hot weather you will need to increase your fluid intake, regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. During heavy exercise in a hot environment, drink two to four glasses (16-32 ounces) of cool fluids each hour.

Signs of dehydration

Dehydration occurs more often in hot weather. It is important to tell walkers to drink plenty of water *before, during, and after* walking. Many people do not drink enough fluids before exercising. Dehydration and heat injury can be prevented, and drinking fluids should be a part of each walker's pre-walk plan. Signs of dehydration are:

- severe thirst
- nausea
- tiredness
- confusion
- headache
- lightheadedness

Treating dehydration

- ◆ Have them stop walking immediately.
- ◆ Take them somewhere cool, so they can cool down and recover.
- ◆ Have them drink more water.

If dehydration is not brought under control, it can lead to heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion may pose a serious health risk. In addition to the signs of dehydration, heat exhaustion also includes:

- heavy sweating
- paleness
- muscle cramps
- weakness
- dizziness
- fainting

Treatment is the same as for dehydration, but if symptoms worsen or last more than one hour, seek medical attention.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp

What to do in case of an accident

- ◆ You may want to attend a basic first aid course.
- ◆ Have a cell phone handy or know the location of the nearest public telephone.
- ◆ It is a good idea to carry some band-aids and wet wipes.
- ◆ Remain calm! Make sure everyone else is okay and not in danger.
- ◆ If the injured person does not need medical attention, have them relax in a safe place until they feel better. Do not leave them unattended. Stay with them or have a fellow walker stay with them.
- ◆ If medical assistance is required, do not move the person. Call 9-1-1. Keep them safe and warm. Stay with them until medical help arrives.
- ◆ Inform Sunter County Active Lifestyles of the accident.

Liability

To protect yourself and Sunter County Active Lifestyles, have all walkers sign and date the disclaimer form found in the Sample Forms.



HAVE A FUN AND ENERGIZING WALK!

Credit and acknowledgement – Many sections of this manual have been adapted from: Department of Sport and Recreation, Western Australia, Walk Leader Training Manual (2005) and British Columbia Recreation and Park Association, British Columbia, Walking Program – Walk Leader Handbook 2007.

Resources

A wealth of information is available about physical activity and walking. This manual covers the basics. You are encouraged to explore other sources of information that would help make your walking group better.

The following are some local and internet resources to give you more ideas and information about physical activity and other health information:



1. Sumter County Active Lifestyles (SCAL) – is the organization coordinating the volunteer walk leader program. SCAL is available to help you with your walking group and collects information about walks and the number of walkers from you. It is a nonprofit community-based coalition promoting active living in Sumter County. Contact information: (803)774-3861 or <http://www.sumtercountyactivelifestyles.org>.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – has information and links to a variety of health topics. At the website, you can find out information and have access to ordering free publications. It is a governmental organization that has reliable and useful information. Website: <http://www.cdc.gov>.
3. Step Up, Step Out! – is a website that has information based on results of a research project conducted by the University of South Carolina Prevention Research Center in coordination with Sumter County Active Lifestyles. The website has weekly tips, an exercise log, places to walk in Sumter County, and many other things that can be of assistance. Website: <http://www.sumtercountyactivelifestyles.org/StepUpStepOut/index.php>
4. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) – can give you information on a variety of health topics as they relate to South Carolina. They have brochures and other information, as well as local offices for you to get more information. Website: <http://www.scdhec.net/>. Local office: Sumter County Health



Department, 105 N. Magnolia Sumter, S.C. 29150 Phone: (803) 773-5511

5. County Extension Office – focuses on information in agriculture, environment, food safety and nutrition, economic and community development, and youth and family. They have free publications about a variety of topics, as well as a local office. Website: <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/>. Local office: 115 N. Harvin Street, 5th floor Sumter, S.C. 29150- Phone: 803-773-5561
6. Contact information about property concerns:

ACCUMULATION AND GROWTH

The growth of grass, weeds or undergrowth other than trees, bushes, flowers or other ornamental plants above the height of one foot



The presence of dilapidated structures or buildings, unsecured buildings, trash, rubbish, debris, garbage, offal, stagnant water, glass, tree trimmings or limbs, wood, unsightly materials or conditions, or any matter, material or condition harmful to good health, public sanitation or public safety

The storage of “junk” (defined as, but not limited to: any appliance, motor vehicle, trailer, equipment, machine or other product that is inoperable, partially operable, wrecked, partially wrecked, dismantled, partially dismantled or discarded– or any parts or pieces of the above; used cans, bottles or paper; discarded chemicals or other such salvage or scrap; and any motor vehicle with an expired license tag or otherwise unsuitable for highway or street operation)

CONTACT: City Public Services, 436-2558.

SIDEWALKS

Holes, depressions, unevenness, gullies or other defect or damage

CONTACT: Sumter County Department of Transportation, 778-5466.

Vehicles parked on the sidewalk or parkway (the place between the curb and sidewalk)

CONTACT: City Dispatch, 436-2774 or 2775 or 2776.

STREET LIGHTING

Burnt-out bulbs, inadequate lighting, etc.

CONTACT: City of Sumter Special Projects Office, 436-2664.

References

1. Task Force on Community Preventive Services. Recommendations to increase physical activity in communities. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2002; 22: 73-102.
2. Mokdad, AH, Marks, JS, Stroup, DF, & Gerding. Actual causes of death in the United States, 2000. *Journal of American Medical Association*. 2004; 291: 1238-1245.
3. Prevalence of Physical Activity, Including Lifestyle Activities Among Adults — United States, 2000–2001, [MMWR](#). August 15, 2003, 52(32):764–769.
4. Nies MA, and Motka, CL. Factors contributing to women’s ability to maintain a walking program. *Journal of Holistic Medicine*. 2006; 24: 7-14.
5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity. Promoting physical activity: a guide for community action. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999.
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Extreme Heat: A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety*. Retrieved June 19, 2008, from http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp

Section
10

Sample Forms

The following forms are for reference. Please feel free to adapt and change them to suit your needs.

Walk Route Planning Checklist

Recruiting Walkers Flyer

Barriers to Being Active Quiz

Suggestions for Overcoming Barriers

Log Sheet

Disclaimer

Emergency Contact Form