

# Winter Walking Toolkit

DECEMBER 2022

The onset of cold weather can make us want to cozy up indoors and embrace a more sedentary season. However, the need for physical activity does not disappear with the warmth. This toolkit provides information, messaging, and resources for staying physically active in the winter months. Walking is an easy, convenient, and affordable way to get moving even in colder climates. Workplaces may use the toolkit to promote their employee's physical and mental wellbeing by encouraging winter walking.

Week 1: Find a walking routine

Week 2: Walk outdoors safely

Week 3: Beyond the physical benefits

Week 4: Accessible winter walking

## How to use the Winter Walking Toolkit

The goal of this toolkit is to share information about the importance of staying physically active in the winter. The information may be used in a variety of ways to reach a wide range of audiences that may benefit from the messages. Here are some ways to use the toolkit content:

- Introduce the weekly walking theme in an email to staff or group members. We recommend adding images and graphics that tie into the theme. We have provided email language you may use, but feel free to edit and add your own ideas and resources.
- Share the quick posts on social media or an employee intranet or message board.
- Create flyers with Winter Walking messages and display them in shared spaces like the break room, office space, or community bulletin board.
- Share the resources available in the toolkit during meetings, gatherings, team emails, or other points of connection with staff, clients, and/or coworkers.

## Week 1: Find a walking routine

### Key communication for Week 1

- **Convenience is key.** Life happens. Schedules are busy and things come up. Finding an easy and convenient way to include walking into your daily life will make getting your physical activity in more attainable and sustainable.

- **Any time is better than no time.** 150 minutes might seem like a lot. Break it down into smaller daily increments, like five 30-minute walks a week. Do not discount the value of a short 10-minute walk. Those minutes add up.

## Email messages for Week 1

Winter brings its own set of challenges. It can be daunting to think about how you're going to fit in your physical activity when the days are shorter, darker, and colder. Post-pandemic, there has been a rise in remote work, and you might find yourself sitting at computer desk at home for most of the day. While the need to physically be somewhere has decreased, the need for movement has not. Walking is the most common and accessible form of physical activity; it is easy, free, and no special skills or equipment are required. Walking can have a meaningful impact on your health in the following ways:

- Reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, etc.
- Reduce risk of depression, anxiety, and stress
- Reduce joint pain/arthritis
- Reduce the risk of falls
- Increase endurance
- Improve sleep
- Boost mood
- Improve focus and memory
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Increase longevity—the number of years you live in good health

Making a few small adjustments to your day can help you incorporate more walking time into your routine. Brainstorm ways in which you can add 10 minutes of walking into your day and try it out! Setting realistic, gradual goals will help make changes more manageable.

## Quick posts for Week 1

- **Our furry friends are good for our health.** Dog owners were 4x more likely to achieve recommended amount of physical activity than non-dog owners, according to one study. Dog walks are a great opportunity to get outside and be active.
- **Exercise? It's a walk in the park.** It's easy to bump up your step count with these simple tricks: take the stairs, park at the back of the lot, take active breaks throughout the day, take an extra loop around the store next time you need to do errands, walk while you take a phone call, get off a stop early if you take public transit. There are so many small opportunities to increase your walking time, get creative!
- ***The phrase something is better than nothing rings true for walking, too.*** While you should aim for 30 minutes of walking 5 days a week, don't let an all-or-nothing mindset keep you

from getting started. Any increase to physical activity can lead to health benefits. It doesn't have to be consecutive. Squeeze in 10 minutes when you can, and the numbers start to add up. Not there yet? That's okay, too. Be gentle with yourself and gradually, you'll get there.

## Additional resources for Week 1

- [Walking resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: \(https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/walking/index.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/walking/index.htm)
- [CDC Walking Campaign Tools for Workplaces: \(https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/tools-resources/walking-campaign-tools/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/tools-resources/walking-campaign-tools/index.html)
- [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition: \(https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical\\_Activity\\_Guidelines\\_2nd\\_edition.pdf\)](https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf)
- [WHO's overview about physical activity: \(https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity)
- [How to Stay Active with Winter Walking: \(https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2020/winter-walking.html\)](https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2020/winter-walking.html)
- [CDC: Adding Physical Activity to Your Life: \(https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adding-pa/index.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adding-pa/index.htm)
- [CDC's Walking Pocket Guide: \(https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/join/pdf/walking-pocket-guide.pdf\)](https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/join/pdf/walking-pocket-guide.pdf)

## Week 2: Walk outdoors safely

### Key communication for Week 2

- **Plan ahead.**
  - Check the weather before heading out for a walk and plan your route and gear accordingly. Sometimes, it may be wisest to stay indoors.
  - Allow for extra transportation time. Driving, walking and rolling generally takes longer in the winter due to the slower pace and increased chance of encountering sidewalk and roadway obstructions. Slower is safer, especially with icy surfaces.
  - Stick to designated walkways as much as possible.
  - When entering a building, take care to remove snow and water from shoes to avoid slipping. Use handrails for support where available.
- **Dress appropriately.**
  - Dress in layers. Layers provide warmth while allowing for heat to circulate, which helps avoid overheating, and layers can be removed as is needed.

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- Wear flat footwear with good traction. Rubber and neoprene composite generally provide better traction on snow and ice. Cleats are also an option.
- Cover areas prone to frostbite including hands and ears.
- Wear bright and/or reflective clothing to increase your visibility to others during dark mornings and evenings
- Use a moisture-wicking fabric as your base layer such as merino wool or polyester, if you have it. Top it off with a windproof layer for maximum protection against the cold. Be aware that cotton will retain moisture and can make you feel wet and cold.
- Wrapping a scarf around your nose and mouth can prevent freezing air from agitating the lungs (especially important if you have a respiratory condition such as asthma). Faces masks for COVID prevention can protect your lungs and keep your face warm, too.
- **Walk like a penguin.**
  - Take shorter steps at a slower pace to avoid slipping risk and allow for increased reaction time.
  - Keep hands out of pockets and avoid carrying items that hinder your balance or arm movements.
  - Do not text or scroll on cell phones while winter walking. If talking on the phone, consider using earbuds to be hands-free.
  - If a fall should occur, try to prevent serious injury using the following tips:
    - Aim to hit the ground with the thigh, hip, then shoulder.
    - Prioritize protecting your head from hitting the ground.
    - Do not brace yourself with outstretched arms.

## Email messages for Week 2

Winter is coming! Cold temperatures, snow, and ice means that additional safety considerations should be made before venturing outdoors. When walking in the winter, it is important to plan ahead, dress appropriately, and adapt your walking style to avoid slipping and falling. Even if winter walking takes some extra effort, your body and mind will thank you.

## Quick posts for Week 2

- **“There’s no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes.”** Especially true in the winter, clothing needs to be functional and protect you from the elements while also keeping you comfortable. The key is versatility. Check out these tips for winter dressing: [8 Tips for Walking in Winter \(https://www.northshore.org/healthy-you/8-tips-for-walking-in-winter/#:~:text=8%20Tips%20for%20Walking%20in%20Winter%201%20Dress,...%207%20Warm-up.%20...%208%20Recover%20afterward.%20\)](https://www.northshore.org/healthy-you/8-tips-for-walking-in-winter/#:~:text=8%20Tips%20for%20Walking%20in%20Winter%201%20Dress,...%207%20Warm-up.%20...%208%20Recover%20afterward.%20)

- **Walk like a penguin!** Penguins are role models for walking on snow and ice. If you walk low and slow, feet turned out and arms free you will increase your stability and reduce risk of falls. No wonder these creatures thrive in the icy Antarctic. This video will show you how it's done: [Ice on the ground? Walk like a penguin to prevent falls and injury.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHaWGibGwyk) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHaWGibGwyk>)
- **Conditions can change rapidly in the winter; take the time to consider how to best be prepared.** Getting from Point A to Point B might take a bit longer than normal. Plan for extra transit time so you don't get caught off guard by any unexpected delays, and to avoid rushing on icy paths. Check the weather forecast to help you plan what to wear, what to bring with you, and your route. Sometimes, the safest option might be staying indoors.
- **Got gear? Dressing for winter doesn't need to break the bank.** If you don't have adequate winter weather gear, check your local thrift stores or charity shops like Goodwill or Salvation Army for affordable options. Alternatively, your local public health agency might be able to connect you to other resources and opportunities in your community.

## Additional resources for Week 2

- [Safety Tips for Winter Walking: \(https://canadasafetycouncil.org/safety-tips-for-winter-walking/\)](https://canadasafetycouncil.org/safety-tips-for-winter-walking/)
- [Winter Weather: \(https://www.osha.gov/winter-weather\)](https://www.osha.gov/winter-weather)
- [Facts About Falls: \(https://www.cdc.gov/falls/facts.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/falls/facts.html)
- [No Falls MN: \(https://yourjuniper.org/no-falls/\)](https://yourjuniper.org/no-falls/)

## Week 3: Beyond the physical benefits

### Key communication for Week 3

- **Opportunity for social connection.**
- **Improve mental health and wellbeing.**
- **Stay energized and improve focus.**
- **Reduce risk of cognitive impairment.**

### Email messages for Week 3

According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1 in 5 Americans reported feelings of social isolation and loneliness in 2019. This statistic has only increased since the Covid-19 pandemic when most indoor public spaces were closed, and social distancing guidelines were in effect. While this was an opportunity to spend more time with our roommates or family members, it reduced opportunities to see “weak ties,” or people on the

periphery of your social sphere. Research suggests interactions with these people also have benefits to our mental wellbeing. Getting out and about—even if it's just a lap around the neighborhood—provides opportunities to see and interact with the community and can have meaningful impacts to wellbeing. If you feel safe engaging with others, gather a group of friends or consider joining a walking group.

The pandemic also highlighted the value of green space in our communities. Biophilia is the theory that humans, by evolution, are programmed to want to interact with nature and other forms of living things. For humans, nature has the innate power to evoke feelings of vastness, curiosity, and awe. Green spaces tend to encourage reflection, mindfulness, and meditation. When people spend time in natural places, it can create a sense of belonging to something bigger, which influences how people make sense of their experiences and help them cope with the difficulties and challenges they are facing. When exposed to nature, people tend to be more likely to put their own personal worries and demands into perspective and, as a result, they feel calmer, less fatigued, and more focused on what is important. For these reasons, natural places are often perceived as “restorative environments.”

Don't underestimate the power of a good walk for mental health and wellbeing as well as physical health.

### Quick posts for Week 3

- **Walking can lead to stronger and healthier neighborhoods.** Walking builds familiarity with people and place. Walking provides opportunity for social interaction which can lead to the formation of weak and strong ties with people in the neighborhood, both of which contribute to positive mental health and wellbeing. Even mere belonging, defined as minimal social connection, is associated with health benefits. Increasing social capital through neighborhood connections improves community capacity and resilience. Read more at: [Neighborhood Walking and Social Connectedness \(https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9062734/#B14\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9062734/#B14)
- **Embrace the outdoors with *Friluftsliv*, the counterpart to *hygge*.** While the Danish concept of *hygge* became a sensation in America, lesser known is the Norwegian concept of *friluftliv* (pronounced free-loofts-liv). Similar to *hygge*, which emphasizes making the most out of dark and cold climates by spending time in the cozy indoors, *friluftliv* is a concept that stresses the beauty and pleasure of being outdoors, no matter the weather. These Nordic lessons are both about savoring a slower pace during the winter, and finding satisfaction in simplicity, which benefits mental health and wellbeing. Try a winter walk to refresh, reset, and enjoy the beauty that the winter season brings.
- **Boosting energy and focus is a step away.** If the cold weather leaves you feeling sluggish and unmotivated, regular walking may be the remedy. Physical activity boosts brain activity in areas associated with focus and attention, making it easier to stay concentrated and productive during the workday.
- **10,000 steps a day to ward off cognitive delay.** Evidence also shows that regular walking is good for brain health. Walking decreases the risk of memory decline due to ageing,

including developing conditions like dementia and Alzheimer's. Some studies suggest that walking 10,000 steps a day can cut risk of developing dementia by up to 50%.

- **Nature: A prescription for calm.** Research shows that nature has a calming effect on our minds. A growing number of doctors are now suggesting that patients spend time in nature to help with feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress.

## Additional resources for Week 3

- [Stay Connected MN Toolkit:](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/communities/stayconnectedmn.html)  
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/communities/stayconnectedmn.html>)
- [Friluftsliv: The Nordic concept of getting outdoors:](https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20171211-friluftsliv-the-nordic-concept-of-getting-outdoors)  
(<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20171211-friluftsliv-the-nordic-concept-of-getting-outdoors>)
- [Walking linked to lower dementia risk:](https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/walking-linked-to-lower-dementia-risk) (<https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/walking-linked-to-lower-dementia-risk>)
- [How Does Nature Impact our Wellbeing?:](https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing) (<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/how-does-nature-impact-our-wellbeing>)
- [Reduce stress in 10 minutes and improve your wellbeing:](https://www.cdc.gov/populationhealth/well-being/features/reduce-stress.htm)  
(<https://www.cdc.gov/populationhealth/well-being/features/reduce-stress.htm>)
- [Stress and Coping Resources:](https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/tools-resources/index.htm) (<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/tools-resources/index.htm>)

## Week 4: Accessible winter walking

### Key communication for Week 4

- **Find indoor winter walking options.** Connect employees to indoor locations suitable for indoor walking in your community.
- **Use mobility devices.** A walking stick, ski poles, or a cane with a retractable ice pick on the bottom can help with balance while walking in the winter.
- **Seek out programs and support.** Connecting with a friend, colleague, family member or program for support might help you get started or maintain your winter walking goals.

### Email messages for Week 4

Only about half of adults nationally meet the minimum recommended level of aerobic physical activity according to the CDC. People face many barriers to exercise such as cost, safety concerns, time, and accessibility challenges. What barriers are stopping you from walking?

Identify and take advantage of the resources your community has to offer so you can work towards improving your overall health through physical activity. For those adults that suffer from arthritis, the *Walk with Ease* program offers walking guidance and support as a method of managing and reducing joint pain. Brainstorm ways in which winter walking can become more accessible for you and take action.

## Quick posts for Week 4

- **Find opportunities to walk indoors.** Don't fret if the winter weather isn't for you; there are ways to be active indoor. While visiting a gym is an option, alternative free or low-cost places to walk might include shopping malls, large department stores, big-box stores, stadiums, or community centers. Local schools and colleges sometimes open their gymnasiums for the public. If you're feeling sick, stay home and get back to your walking routine when your symptoms go away.
- **Ever heard of Nordic walking? This fitness trend might be perfect for you.** This four-season activity is just like regular walking with the addition of ski poles. The ski poles increase stability and may be beneficial for those that have difficulties with balance. Using poles engages the upper body, which provides additional calorie-burning capacity and muscle activation to this aerobic activity.
- **Programs and support are available for you.** If you are worried about keeping up with your walking routine, enlist a friend or family member as a walking partner to help keep you accountable. Designed for people with joint pain, *Walk with Ease* is a free walking program that provides you with information and structure to help you get started on your walking journey. For more about *Walk with Ease*, look here: [About the Walk with Ease Program \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/arthritis/activity/walkwithease.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/arthritis/activity/walkwithease.html)

## Additional resources for Week 4

- [Let's Walk Minnesota Toolkit: \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/arthritis/about/walktoolkit.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/arthritis/about/walktoolkit.html)
- [Fitness trend: Nordic walking: \(https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/fitness-trend-nordic-walking\)](https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/fitness-trend-nordic-walking)
- [About the Walk with Ease Program: \(https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/walking/walk-with-ease/wwe-about-the-program\)](https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/healthy-living/physical-activity/walking/walk-with-ease/wwe-about-the-program)
- [Mall Walking: A Program Resource Guide: \(https://depts.washington.edu/hprc/programs-tools/tools-guides/mall-walking-resource-guide/?\\_ga=2.150265974.1186308075.1669868729-899590422.1669868584\)](https://depts.washington.edu/hprc/programs-tools/tools-guides/mall-walking-resource-guide/?_ga=2.150265974.1186308075.1669868729-899590422.1669868584)