

Starting a Walking Group

Tired of walking alone? Can't find any walking groups where you live? Why not start your own! Walking with others has lots of benefits:



- It's safer than walking alone
- It relieves boredom
- It's fun and motivating
- It gives you a chance to socialize and make friends
- It increases your commitment to your walking routine

Starting a walking group, needn't take much time or effort. Here's what you need to do:

Contact the Way2Go Regional Advisor on (03) 544 3957 ext 1 or email way2go@iconz.co.nz
Glenis can help with advertising and promotions and also help develop a health and safety plan for your group.

Advertise. Post fliers in your local library, recreation or community center, council office, age concern office, information centre, local café at work or place of worship. Take advantage of free what's on listings in local newspapers or school newsletters. The fliers should invite interested walkers to a meeting place/venue and you also should include a telephone number for people to contact you.

Hold a meeting. At your first meeting, listen to what the group has to say. Then decide together:

- How many times a week the group will walk
- Where you will walk
- What time you will meet and how far you will go

You might want to map out several different routes. You can increase the distance as you go along.

You'll also want to set a plan for:

- Will you walk if it's raining?
- Will you have a walk leader and what do you do in case of emergencies?
- Will members call one another if someone can't make it, or will the group just walk with whoever shows up? You can make the group as formal or informal as you like.

Other things you might want to discuss include dressing for the weather, warming up and cooling down, and recording and tracking progress.

Finally get a demonstration on proper walking techniques and stretching to avoid or reduce injuries. Before the meeting ends, create a telephone tree so group members can contact each other.

Get organized. Once your group is up and walking, you might want to get more organized. Here are some of the things you can do:

- Give your group a name and have T-shirts printed
- Have coffee or lunch after your walks. Organize an all-day or weekend walk to explore a new place
- Start a newsletter
- Organize a community have-a-go walk to get others interested in your group.

Motivation might start to dwindle over time so keep new challenges coming. People often find that one of the biggest challenges they face with any exercise program is sticking with it over the long haul.

Remember that your continued enthusiasm is very important. Talk about how walking has improved your life. Encourage and welcome new walkers. And most of all be a good role model by being a committed walker.