

Whole-Person Health  
Begins with a

WALK



# W

alking for health and well-being is a life-changing habit. When taking a walk becomes a daily routine, substantial benefits — that go well beyond fitness — arise. A walking routine promotes thriving in all domains of well-being and enhanced quality of life.

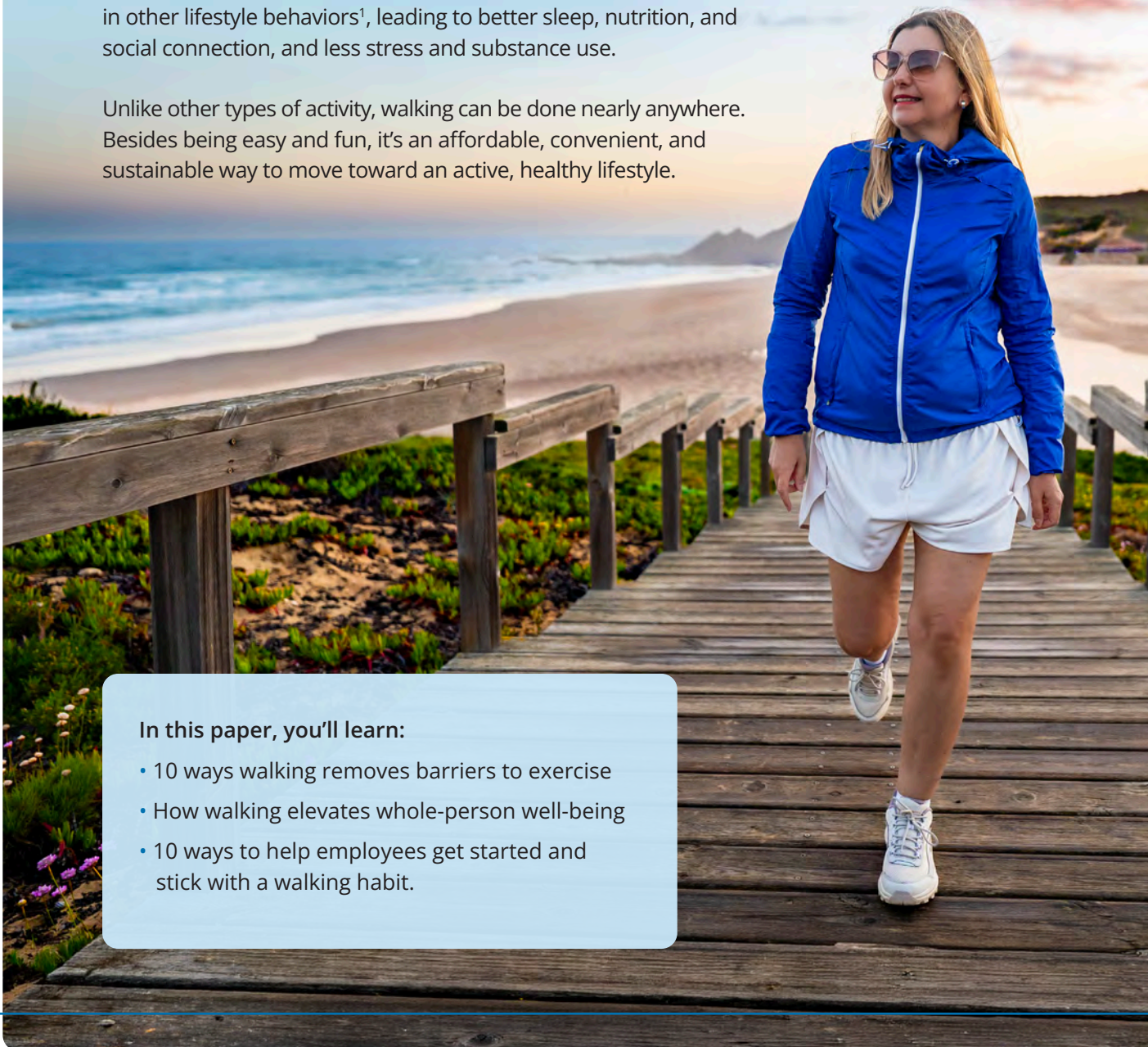
With over 3 decades of crafting, refining, and reinventing walking challenges, we've learned a lot about the impact of walking on whole-person health and happiness. Our participants continue to share compelling insights about how good walking makes them feel and many ways walking enhances their lives. And scientific evidence continues to reveal the remarkable impact of walking on well-being.

Physical activity, like walking, is also associated with improvements in other lifestyle behaviors<sup>1</sup>, leading to better sleep, nutrition, and social connection, and less stress and substance use.

Unlike other types of activity, walking can be done nearly anywhere. Besides being easy and fun, it's an affordable, convenient, and sustainable way to move toward an active, healthy lifestyle.

## In this paper, you'll learn:

- 10 ways walking removes barriers to exercise
- How walking elevates whole-person well-being
- 10 ways to help employees get started and stick with a walking habit.



# WALKING

## The Path of Least Resistance

Exercise doesn't come easy for everyone. From an evolutionary standpoint, humans are wired to conserve energy whenever possible — a survival advantage in environments where calories were scarce — which can make the instinct to avoid unnecessary physical exertion, like exercise, feel both natural and hard to override. And knowing that exercise is beneficial isn't enough to fuel lasting motivation.

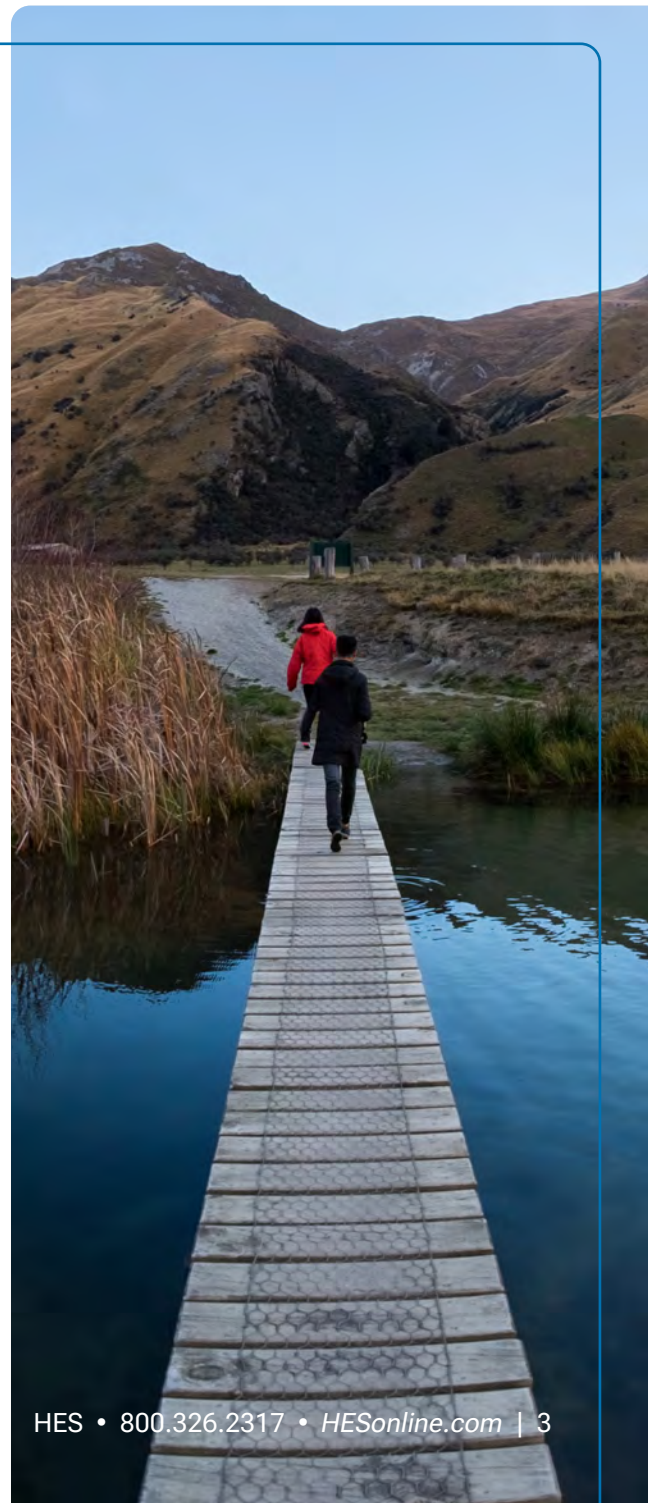
The truth is that getting started and sticking with an exercise habit can be a heavy lift. It's a complex behavior that requires ongoing personal effort in the face of daily conflicts, distractions, and competing priorities.

Here's a sampling of common personal barriers to exercise:

- I don't know what to do/where to start
- I'm too self-conscious/embarrassed
- I don't have the time or energy
- I don't want to exercise alone
- I've tried but have never been able to stick with it
- I don't want to get sweaty at work.

The simplest way to help people move more is to promote walking, an activity that many don't think of as exercise. Walking is a realistic way for most people to increase physical activity and overall well-being, feel noticeably better, and stick with it, on their own terms.

Unlike many types of sports and fitness activities, walking is a familiar and simple way to move. Common activities such as using public transportation, moving around the workplace, and grocery shopping all involve walking. Starting a walking routine doesn't involve much of a learning curve; we already know how to walk.



# 10 Ways Walking Removes Barriers to Getting and Staying Active

Walking removes many obstacles to being active, making a walking challenge an ideal way to support employees in beginning or renewing a physical activity habit. Walking supports all areas of well-being; helping employees develop a walking habit can start a snowball effect resulting in better health and performance throughout your organization.

Walking is:

- 1 Accessible.** Almost anyone can walk; it's easy, fun, and free. Walking for exercise builds on an everyday activity that most people already do.



- 2 Adaptable and inclusive.** Effort level, time, and distance can be personalized, as well as type of walk — with others or solo, planned or spontaneous, outdoors or indoors, on land or in a pool, with/without assistive devices.



- 3 Contemplative.** Mindful walking is an active way to meditate. Stepping out for a walk can be restorative for the soul as well as mind and body.

- 4 Convenient.** Getting away from work for a short walk is a simple way to add more physical activity.

- 5 Family-friendly.** People of all ages can walk together, from walking to school to exploring parks and trails.



- 6 Flexible.** Even short walks are beneficial. Walking in small increments, such as 10 or 15 minutes at a time, accommodates busy or variable schedules.

- 7 Free.** Public spaces like neighborhoods, parks, trails, and waterfronts are no-cost walking options. In some areas, shopping malls, public school grounds, and sports venues are open regularly for walkers.

- 8 No-fuss.** Comfortable shoes/clothing and a safe place to walk are the only things needed. No special skills or equipment required.



- 9 Social.** Walking together is a fun way to stay connected and strengthen relationships.

- 10 Stress-soothing.** A walk offers a change of scenery, a shift in perspective, and a chance to think, reflect, and unwind.

*“Easy to use, very inspiring to see how everyday movement can get you fit. You don’t need an extreme exercise program.”*

Susan M.  
USPTO, 10K-A-Day participant



## Walking Around the World

For adults, walking is the most popular form of physical activity in most countries. It’s number 1 in the Americas, Eastern Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, and Western Pacific. In Europe, walking is second only to soccer; in Africa, it comes in behind running.<sup>2</sup>

Public health data highlights an important fact: many adults still don’t get any — or enough — exercise. Establishing walking as the cornerstone of your well-being initiatives can help people move from inactive to active ... and the sporadically active to a solid habit.

### By the numbers:

**25%** US adults getting *no* physical activity in their free time.<sup>3</sup>

**50%** US adults meeting federal guidelines for moderate/vigorous physical activity.<sup>5</sup>

**31%** Worldwide adults *not* getting the 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week recommended by the World Health Organization.<sup>4</sup>

**59%** US adults reporting walking for leisure in the past 7 days; **16%** reported walking for transportation.<sup>6</sup>



Walking Elevates Whole-Person

# HEALTH

Regular exercise, including walking, is linked to improvements in other areas of well-being<sup>7</sup> — such as nutrition, sleep, social connection, stress, and more. When someone establishes a walking habit, they're more likely to sleep better, eat more-nutritious foods, and feel less stressed, for example.

Walking can serve as a realistic path to thriving in many areas of life, especially for those feeling defeated or stuck after unsuccessful attempts at habit change. Heading out for a walk most days is an easy win that brings an abundance of well-being rewards.

## Which Healthy Habits Make the Most Difference?

Living the kind of life that good health makes possible is a universal desire. We can't control every factor, but living a healthful lifestyle *substantially* tips the odds in favor of well-being. It's not just about living longer, having a better health-related quality of life is something many people yearn for.

[The American College of Lifestyle Medicine](#) identifies 6 interconnected behavioral pillars vital to preventing and managing clinical conditions like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. These pillars also play a significant role in improving mental/emotional well-being and reducing risk for disorders like depression and anxiety.



### **Physical Activity**

Move every day and incorporate strength, flexibility, balance, and aerobic activities (like daily walking) into your routine.



### **Optimal Nutrition**

Eat more whole foods and focus on minimally processed, plant-predominant, nutrient-dense meals and snacks.



### **Stress Management**

Develop healthy coping skills to meet the ever-changing demands of life and bolster resilience.

## 6 Pillars of Lifestyle Medicine

### **Restorative Sleep**

Create the right conditions to get 7-9 hours of quality sleep every night to allow the body to reset and recover.



### **Connectedness**

Foster supportive relationships and build connections that bring meaning and purpose to life.



### **Risky Substance Avoidance**

Avoid behaviors that include the consumption of or exposure to harmful substances.



*(Adapted from American College of Lifestyle Medicine)*

# How Walking Supports Each Lifestyle Medicine Pillar

Walking — as a popular, budget-friendly, low-barrier way to be active — plays a vital role in bringing better health and quality of life within reach:

## Physical Activity

*Move every day and incorporate strength, flexibility, balance, and aerobic activities (like daily walking) into your routine.*

- Walking is linked to greater exercise self-efficacy, with greatest gains seen in those walking outdoors.<sup>8</sup> When people believe in their ability to be active, they're more active.
- Walking is also linked to improved self-regulation<sup>9,10</sup> and increased *general* self-efficacy,<sup>11</sup> essential factors in sustainable habit change. Getting better at managing and directing one's own emotions and behavior plus having the confidence to keep moving forward supports behavior change in other areas of well-being.
- Walkers are 3 times more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than those who don't walk for exercise.<sup>12,13</sup>

*Walkers are 3 times more likely to meet physical activity guidelines than those who don't walk for exercise.*



## Optimal Nutrition

*Eat more whole foods and focus on minimally processed, plant-predominant, nutrient-dense meals and snacks.*

- Physically active adults generally report better nutrition habits.<sup>14</sup>
- Regular exercise, such as walking, enhances brain structure and function. Resulting changes can improve decision-making around eating habits and [food choices](#).<sup>15</sup>
- Enhanced exercise self-regulation is linked to improved self-regulation in eating behaviors.<sup>16</sup>

## Connectedness

*Foster supportive relationships and build connections that bring meaning and purpose to life.*

- Walking offers easy ways to connect — like catching up with a coworker, saying hi to a neighbor, or smiling/nodding at someone passing by. Neighborhood walking, for example, increases brief social connections that help build friendships.<sup>17</sup> Even [incidental social encounters](#) are important for mental well-being, and walking helps people have more of them.
- Group walking fosters a sense of *belonging, acceptance, and companionship*<sup>18</sup> that promotes enjoyment and contributes to social, mental, and emotional well-being.
- [Walking with coworkers strengthens connections](#), contributing to a stronger sense of belonging, camaraderie, and teamwork.
- Physical activity, including walking, reduces stress and for many, improves mood, easing the way for more enjoyable conversations and time together.



## Restorative Sleep

*Create the right conditions to get 7-9 hours of quality sleep every night to allow the body to reset and recover.*

- Regular walking, even at a light intensity, improves subjective sleep quality for healthy adults, as well as those with chronic conditions or mild sleep impairment.<sup>19</sup>
- Physical activities such as walking help reduce insomnia.<sup>20</sup>
- Walking and other types of physical activity improve sleep efficiency — the percentage of actual asleep time in bed.
- 30+ minutes of moderate-intensity walking on most days appears to be most effective, with improvements seen in 4-12 weeks.<sup>21,22</sup>



## Stress Management

*Develop healthy coping skills to meet the ever-changing demands of life and bolster resilience.*

- Going for a walk together combines the benefits of more social time plus exercise, both vital for effectively managing stress and fostering resilience.
- [Walking more \(greater than 5000 steps/day compared to less than 5000 steps/day\) is associated with reduced symptoms of depression.](#) Further, those walking 7000 or more steps/day appear to have a lower risk of developing depression.<sup>23</sup>
- Green exercise (done in the presence of nature) improves mood and self-esteem in as little as 5 minutes.<sup>24</sup>
- Walking in nature is more restorative than walking in an urban setting.<sup>25</sup> In addition, it's linked to reductions in anxiety as well as anger and hostility. Improved energy, emotions, and positive engagement are also seen.<sup>26</sup>
- Urban walking can be beneficial and enjoyable, too. Getting out for an active break is a simple way to bring stress down and recharge no matter the setting.



## Risky substance avoidance

*Avoid behaviors that include the consumption of or exposure to harmful substances.*

- For example, physical activity is linked to reduced risk for developing substance use disorders. A sedentary lifestyle is associated with a 1.5-2 fold greater risk of developing alcohol use disorder.<sup>27</sup>
- Long-term exercise interventions significantly increase abstinence rates, reduce withdrawal symptoms, and decrease anxiety and depression.<sup>28</sup>
- Exercise decreases substance use and supports recovery plus relapse prevention. Combinations of moderate aerobic exercise (like brisk walking), strength training, and mind body exercise (such as yoga, tai chi) are effective in reducing cravings, improving abstinence rates, and enhancing mental health as well as quality of life, and supporting recovery in those with substance-use disorders.<sup>29,30</sup>

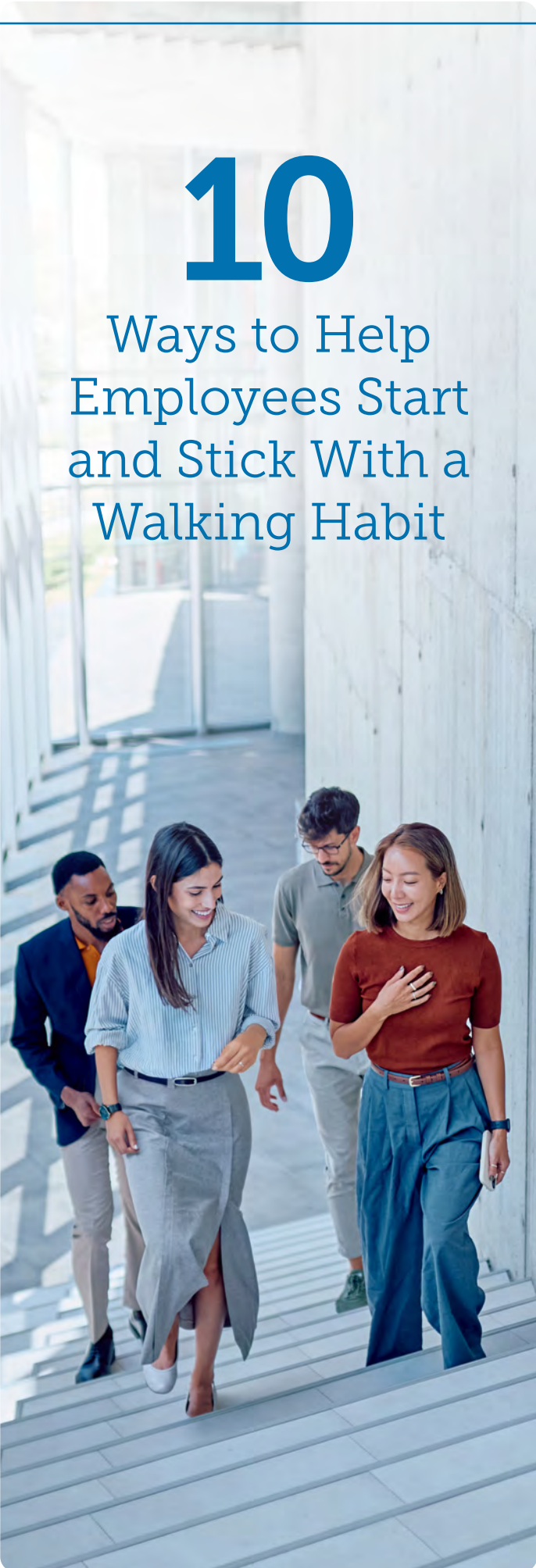
Scientific evidence points to significant 2-way influences of mental/physical health within these pillars.<sup>31</sup> Consistently getting a good night's sleep, for example, helps reduce stress. And managing stress effectively can help people sleep better. Mental/physical health are interdependent — a compelling reason why ongoing support for walking plus other healthy lifestyle behaviors is foundational to any workplace wellness effort.

***"It's getting easier and easier to get in the 10,000 steps! The more I walk, the more I want to walk."***

Julie K.  
University of Minnesota, 10K-A-Day participant

# 10

## Ways to Help Employees Start and Stick With a Walking Habit



Take steps to build a culture of walking throughout your organization. Embed friendly messaging throughout your internal marketing channels: “Walk at a pace you enjoy,” for example, welcomes hopeful beginners to power walkers.

Ideas:

- 1 Offer an annual walking-focused wellness challenge wrapped in a fun theme — like [Walktober](#), [Star Trak](#), [10K-A-Day](#), or [Bloom](#).
- 2 Recruit volunteer walking ambassadors. Ask them to organize regular groups open to all, personally invite people to join, and generate future ideas for walking promotions.
- 3 [Make gathering a walking group easier](#) by offering convenient times and locations.
- 4 Encourage hybrid/remote workers to walk daily with family, friends, and neighbors.
- 5 Promote recurring walking events such as weekly *Walking Wednesdays* or a monthly/quarterly companywide *Let's Walk* day.
- 6 Publicize indoor and outdoor places to walk — public parks and trails, school grounds, city sidewalks, shopping centers, and sports arenas.
- 7 Ask participants to share testimonials about what they get out of walking — tangible and intangible benefits.
- 8 Organize a team for a 5K/10K event and sponsor registration.
- 9 Launch a *buddy challenge*. Encourage 10 or more partner walks a month by awarding random prizes.
- 10 Highlight furry walking companions by designating a *Dog Day* for everyone to [post selfies with their dogs](#) during or after a walk.

*“This has been the highlight of my year. No joke. The Community! The recipes! The visuals! The wellness information. The Leaves! The Badges! Thrive Thursdays! Absolutely no stone was left unturned regarding the breadth and depth of this program. I feel so charged and motivated not to let it end here, but to have a form of Walktober every month going forward. I’m a believer!”*

Yolanda B.

Mutual of Omaha, [Walktober](#) participant

Walking Works

# WONDERS

The ease, convenience, and familiarity of walking make it a practical and widely appealing activity. As a low-threshold, high-reward way for people to move more, it's an ideal way for organizations of all sizes to inspire a happier, healthier, more active, and better connected workforce.

*"I feel better than ever! I have walked far more and have gone to the gym consistently. I am glad I took part in this year's Walktober and hope for many more!"*

Alfredo C.  
University of Rochester, *Walktober* participant



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<sup>4</sup>World Health Organization. *Physical Activity*. WHO Newsroom, accessed January 26, 2026.

<sup>5</sup>Abernethy, D., Bennie, J., Pavey, T. (2025). Temporal trends in aerobic physical activity guideline adherence among nationally representative samples of U.S. adults between 2011 and 2019. *PLOS ONE*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0316051>.

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