

Enjoy the great outdoors and get an aerobic boost when you step off the sidewalk and onto a rustic trail for your walking exercise.

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PHOTOS BY Adam Albright



A new twist on your walking routine may help you feel more energized and offer the long-term weight-management results you desire. Head off road and start trail blazing! The intensity of the trail walking experience (and the effects on your muscles) is enhanced because the ground surfaces and slopes vary. Trail walking is an invigorating and effective way to incinerate calories and improve your aerobic fitness level. With a little bit of forethought and easy preparation, you can continue walking outdoors during the cooler months of fall and continue to reap the benefits of fresh outdoor exercise.

Trail blazing benefits

Aerobic fitness is the ability to engage in sustained, uninterrupted physical activity using the large muscles of the lower body without feeling tired or winded. It reflects how well your heart and lungs work together to supply oxygen and fuel sources to your exercising muscles, heart, and body. As you increase your intensity level through the natural variations of the outdoor walking paths and trails, you'll burn more calories and improve your

aerobic fitness at a far greater rate than on flat, paved sidewalks. As a result the body's circulating insulin helps shuttle blood glucose into the working muscles to serve as fuel (instead of excess blood glucose causing damage to veins and organs or being stored as fat).

Being prepared

Consider a pack to tote a filled water bottle, sunscreen, bug spray, a map, and a cell phone. If you are going alone, leave a note with your intended route. Be aware of pending inclement weather and pack accordingly.

Comfort wear

Layer your clothes for comfort and weather protection. In tick country long sleeves and long pants are essential. Your base layer should wick sweat away from your body to keep skin dry. Look for performance fabrics such as Thermion, polypropylene, Thermax, Thinsulate, and silk rather than cotton. The middle layer serves as insulation; polar fleece or high-tech knit or wool is ideal and can be removed if you get too warm. The outer layer should be a waterproof and windproof breathable jacket.

Pack your supplies (such as water, sunscreen, glucose, and meds if needed), include some binoculars for nature watching, and opt for supportive and flexible, well-fitting shoes with good traction.



Find a list of National Trails Day events on the American Hiking Society website, americanhiking.org. Visit your local parks and recreation website to discover walking trails in parks, nature preserves, and other conservation areas near you.



Track your walk by steps or miles at DiabeticLivingOnline.com/track-my-walk

Basic trail walking


Stand tall and erect. Step forward with one foot, landing toe-ball-heel, and pull your other foot through to take the next step.

Adding arms: Moving your arms as you step can increase the aerobic intensity of the work by as much as 20 percent. Move your arms in opposition to your legs with a slight bend at the elbows and relaxed hands. Continue to use your arms as you walk to help with gait and exercise intensity.

Front lunges: To increase the intensity of your walk, lengthen your stride, but only on terrain that can support long, sure strides. To really boost the caloric expenditure, take 6–10 forward lunges for every 500–1,000 feet you cover. This increases the muscle mass used and ups the intensity.

Nordic walking

Pole walking, also called Nordic walking, *opposite*, is an effective, low-impact activity. It can increase the caloric expenditure by as much as 40 percent compared with regular trail walking.

Pole technique: Keep your arms and shoulders relaxed. The lead pole should strike the ground parallel to your opposing foot; the back pole should point diagonally behind you as you push it back in a long, straight line. As you stride, ease your grip on the back pole handle and let the wrist straps help you bring the pole forward as you step onto the opposite foot. 



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Pole Lunges

Place both poles in front of your lead foot as you lunge, keeping your elbows flexed and chin parallel to the ground.



Bring your back leg forward, at the same time lifting the poles and smoothly moving them forward.



Step into the lunge and repeat on each foot 6–10 times for a set. Aim for three or four sets of lunges during your walk.