

Training Tips



Training well is essential to completing, and enjoying, any long distance walk. We've pulled together some tips to help you get the most out of your event.

Get Training

- Your training should **concentrate on building a good base of walking fitness**. Try to walk several times a week, mixing shorter walks with one long walk each week, increasing the distance slowly. To avoid injury it's recommended not to increase your total mileage per week, or the distance of your long walk by more than 10%.
- **It isn't necessary to cover the full distance in your training walks** – marathon runners will often only train to around 20 miles, rather than the full 26.2 miles – and the same applies for long distance walkers.
- **There are various training schedules available online** for distance walking (running training plans can often work well for walkers too, and give an idea about the best way to build mileage). If you don't like the rigidity of following a set training plan, make sure you walk regularly (3-4 times a week) and increase distance slowly.
- **Cross training**, or incorporating other types of training, such as cycling or an exercise class, into your week will also help build stamina and increase overall fitness.

Remember, you need endurance, not speed. You want to build mental stamina for walking for several hours at a steady pace. Remember to eat and drink well during your training, including during longer walks if you need to.

Gearing Up

Whilst you don't need special equipment or clothing to be able to walk anywhere, distance walking is a lot more easy and enjoyable if you have the right kit. You should also ensure that you train in the kit you will be wearing on the day to ensure that it all fits well and doesn't rub anywhere or make you uncomfortable.

- **Most important are your shoes or boots** – if these don't fit well then they will cause you pain and injury. Walking shoes are lighter, but walking boots give greater ankle support for trekking over rough ground. If you visit any high street specialist shop they should be able to give you advice and help provide a shoe or boot that fits.
- **Socks are also important**. Even if you have the perfect shoe or boot, the wrong socks will give you blisters and sores, so invest in a pair or two of special walking socks.

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- **Clothing should be comfortable and fit well.** Plan for the layers you will need given the climate and terrain. Choose wicking fabrics that will allow your skin to breathe and cool itself.
- If you are planning to use trekking poles, backpack or any other equipment make sure you **have, and use, them well in advance too.** It's even worth trying things like sunscreen in advance, as you don't want adverse reactions.

Before the event

- In the lead up to the big day, you should **cut down on your training** or 'taper' as the professionals say! You'll need to arrive feeling fresh and fully recovered from your training. Tapering doesn't mean you should stop training altogether, just that you should cut back on the volume and intensity.
- It's also a good idea to use the time you save on training during your taper to **get some rest.** You should also make sure that you eat and sleep well, and drink plenty of fluids.
- Make sure you have everything together for the big day in advance and know what you are wearing and taking with you. If possible, **pack your bags for the event the night before** and lay out your clothes ready for the morning.
- **Clip your toenails** short. Lots of long-distance walkers lose toenails if they are too long, and avoid having a pedicure before the walk; you want to ensure your feet are as 'toughened' as possible – save the pampering for after the event when you've earned it!

On the Day

- Along the way, **stretch and move muscles** that you don't normally move as you walk. For example, if you are at a rest stop, roll your shoulders a few times forward and backwards; you can't imagine how good it feels.
- Make sure you **stay well hydrated** during the walk and don't let yourself get thirsty. You should also make sure you eat enough during the event, with small, regular snacks being easiest to digest – now is not the time to worry about calories! You can carry water and snacks with you, or the '4millionsteps' event in Sussex does have regular feed stations along the routes.
- **Once you've finished, take time to stretch,** especially before you sit down to rest or travel on a long journey. It help you recover and lessen any aches or pains in your limbs. It's also important to ensure you rehydrate (especially if it's been a hot day) and to refuel with healthy snacks that are a mix of protein and carbohydrates.
- When you get home, if you can stand it, having a **cold shower** shrinks the swelling that has occurred during your walk. If you can handle a cold bath, even better – adding ice cubes will really do the trick. Save the hot shower or bath for a few hours later.

Illness and injuries

Whilst walking is seen as a low impact sport, as with any exercise, there is always the chance of injuries occurring. It's important to listen to your body and not to push yourself and risk further, long term, injury.

- **If you fall ill,** listen to your body and rest as much as you need to in order to recover from the illness. You may need to reduce or even stop your training sessions until you recover and feel strong enough to continue training. Don't worry about losing fitness or missing sessions – it is more important that you recover fully and have the strength to continue for the rest of the training period.

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- **Blisters** are a relatively common walkers injury and can be caused by poorly fitting shoes/boots or socks. Wherever possible, resist the urge to 'pop' the blister as the unbroken skin over a blister provides a natural barrier to infection.
- Most **sprains and strains** are relatively minor and can be treated at home. Minor sprains and strains can usually be treated with self-care techniques, such as PRICE therapy (protection, rest, ice, compression and elevation). Generally, you should try to start moving a sprained joint as soon as it's not too painful to do so, whereas a strained muscle should normally be immobilised for at least a few days. Ordinary painkillers, such as paracetamol, can be used to help ease any pain, although stronger medication can be prescribed if the pain is more severe.

More information about treating these and other injuries can be found on the NHS website – www.nhs.co.uk – including details of what symptoms you should look out for that may need further medical help. If you have any concerns over an injury, or are worried about your fitness or any other physical aspect of your challenge then please see your GP.