

SUPPORTING A WALKING CLUB

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Physical activity guidelines for adults suggest moving more and sitting less, and for considerable health benefits adults should engage in 150-300 minutes a week of moderate-intense activity [1]. Walking is a great way to help meet physical activity recommendations and offers a wide range of benefits, including improvements in blood pressure, weight and stress management [2,3]. Walking clubs combine the act of walking with social time and are typically five to 15 people who meet regularly to walk for a pre-set amount of time and/or distance. Clubs might meet weekly or multiple times a week and track their mileage, time or progress. Typically, weekly walking time will be up to 75 minutes [4]; however, you will want to adjust your time based on your audience and walking ability.

Walking clubs can be a great way for participants at community sites to build relationships with their peers and get active. Walking in groups offers social support and shared experiences of being active. This can help participants start and sustain physical activity goals [5].

Extension agents or program assistants can support walking clubs wherever they deliver education. Some great sites to partner with are senior centers, community centers, schools or faith communities. The information below outlines the role that Extension agents and program assistants can play in supporting walking clubs and provides resources to help make the club successful.

To get started, work with your site partner to complete the following:	
Step 1: Appoint a club coordinator	<p>A coordinator should be staff at the site or community member and a champion for walking. This person will be responsible for leading the walking club, tracking miles, sending out meeting reminders and coordinating snacks (if available).</p> <p>The club coordinator will likely need to commit about 30 minutes a week to preparation. The club coordinator can work closely with the Extension agent or program assistant to plan for the start of the walking club. This might include determining who will lead the club walks (will one person lead all of the walks or will members take turns?) and how the club will operate and communicate.</p> <p>Extension agents or program assistants can help recruit class participants to lead walks. They can also volunteer to lead walks but should not be solely responsible for this. Empowering the someone from the site to lead the walking group is more likely to lead to sustainable change.</p>
Step 2: Identify a safe walking route	<p>Identify the route: This could be a track, a nearby walking trail or laps in a hallway. Think about your club members when determining route length location. Locations with seating along the route could help accommodate for various abilities. Consider setting a shorter and a longer distance for different walking abilities and so that members can suit their schedules on any given day. Design alternatives to routine walking courses when the weather is uncooperative.</p> <p>Map the route: There are multiple ways to map the route for participants. Google Maps or Map My Walk offers two options. You can also purchase a distance wheel to determine the mileage. To purchase a distance wheel, reach out to the Tennessee Nutrition Consumer Education Program (TNCEP) state team.</p>
Step 3: Mark the route with signage	<p>The site can create their own signage or use TNCEP walking signage. Extension agents and program assistants can order walking signs for qualifying partners in the spring or fall TNCEP order. Sites will need to provide any posts or hardware needed to post or hang signs.</p>
Step 4: Find club support	<p>Club support might include snacks, water or incentives (such as water bottles, pedometers or tote bags). Club support also could include rewards for those making their walking goals (such as a coupon for discounts on shoes or membership to the YMCA for a month). Ask the site if there is funding to support club needs. Consider partner organizations that might be able to provide support if the site cannot.</p>

To get started, work with your site partner to complete the following: (CONTINUED)	
Step 5: Recruit club members and host an intro meeting	<p>Extension agents and program assistants can help recruit walking club members from their classes and through other community partners. At the first meeting, the club should schedule regular walking times, decide how long or how far everyone will walk (keep meeting times consistent!), and decide the best way to communicate with each other (text, message board, email, etc.). The club coordinator should remind at risk members to check in with their doctor before starting an exercise routine. They should also provide participants with other safety information that might include understanding the intensity of activity through a talk test or ensuring that participants start off slow before increasing intensity (“start low and go slow”), and discussing the importance of staying hydrated while being active.</p> <p>Teach Participants the “Talk Test” <i>A talk test can help participants measure the intensity level of their activity. For moderate intensity activities which often includes brisk walking (not speed walking), participants should be able to talk but not sing [6].</i></p>
Step 6: Maintain records of mileage walked for each member	Provide site participants with a form for tracking miles (see the resource in this document). Participants can use wearable devices to track steps, if available. They can also use a walking app on their phones [5]. Acknowledge participants who meet walking goals. If possible, work with the site leader to offer recognition, incentives and awards for walking.
Step 7: Keep things interesting	Do something different occasionally, such as a hiking field trip. Incorporate walking challenges such as Walk Across Tennessee . Don’t forget to check in with club members regularly to collect feedback about how to improve the club.
Step 8: Work with volunteers	Working with volunteers throughout the process can help to support club sustainability and allow for expansion of clubs to multiple community sites. If possible, Extension agents and program assistants can identify and support multiple volunteers to help lead and coordinate walking clubs. Find more information about volunteering with UT Extension on the following UT Extension Volunteerism website.

WHAT TO TRACK:

Extension agents and program assistants can collect success stories from walking clubs to share with other community partners. If any trail or walking track improvements are made as a result of increased use, agents and program assistants should make note in their success stories. Time spent working with volunteers can also be tracked and reported.

CHECK OUT OTHER EXTENSION WALKING RESOURCES:

[Walk Across Tennessee, Add Physical Activity to your Day!](#)

[Promoting Physical Activity at the Workplace](#)

[BeMore: A Guide for Walking Clubs](#)

CITATIONS:

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Retrieved from https://health.gov/paguidelines/second-edition/pdf/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf
2. Hanson, S., Jones, A., “Is there evidence that walking groups have health benefits? A systematic review and meta-analysis.” British Journal of Sports Medicine, Vol. 49, No. 11, 2015, <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/49/11/710.abstract>
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5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Social Supports. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/community-strategies/social-supports.html>
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). Measuring Physical Activity Intensity. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/measuring/index.html>

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JOIN OUR WALKING CLUB!

All are welcome and encouraged to join!

The club meets every week on:

Time:

Place:

We will supply:

Walking and being regularly active offers a wide range of health improvements including blood pressure, healthy weight and stress relief. Get moving today!



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