

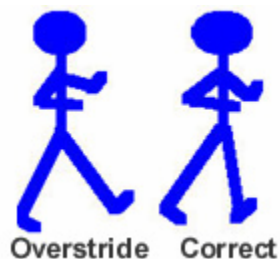
# 10 Walking Mistakes to Avoid

## Mistake #1: Over striding

When walkers try to walk faster, a natural inclination is to lengthen your stride in front, reaching out further with your forward foot. This leads to a clumsy, ungainly gait, striking hard with the feet. Your shins hurt and you really don't get any faster.

**The cure:** All of the power of your walk comes from pushing with the back leg and foot.

- \* If you are trying to walk fast, concentrate on taking shorter, quicker steps.
- \* Then think of really rolling through your step with your back foot and leg, getting a good push off.
- \* The result will be faster feet and lengthening your stride where it does you some good - in back.



## Mistake #2: The Wrong Shoes

- Heavy.
- Stiff - soles won't bend, can't twist them.
- Over 1 year old.
- Too small when foot swells while walking.

If this describes your shoes, you are setting yourself up for plantar fasciitis, muscle pulls and knee problems.

**The cure:** Get fit for the right shoes at a technical running shoe store in your area. The athletic shoe experts will make sure you get the right shoe for overpronation, flexible enough for walking, sized right for the swelling everyone's feet have while walking.

## Mistake #3: Flapping, Slapping Feet

- Your feet hit the ground with a slap.
- You land flat footed with each step and get no roll.
- You may develop shin pain.

This means that instead of rolling through the step with your forward foot, it is flattening out prematurely. Either you are fighting stiff, heavy shoes or your shins are too weak to let you roll through the step.

**The cure:** Get flexible shoes that bend at the ball of the foot. A pair of running shoes with a low heel is best.

To strengthen your shins, ankle, and lower leg:

**Toe raises:** Stand on a stair facing upstairs with your heels hanging over the edge. Dip the heels down, then raise them high. Repeat 10-20 times.

**Foot fun:** While sitting around, several times a day, tap your toes quickly for several seconds. Then write the alphabet in the air with your foot. Repeat with the other foot.

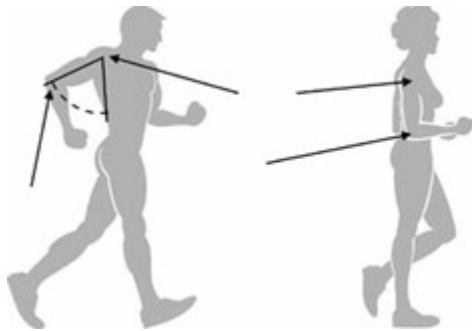
**Heel walking:** As part of your warm-up, walk on your heels for 30 seconds.

#### **Mistake #4: No Arms**

You keep your arms still at your sides while walking, or swing them without bending them. You notice that your hands swell quite a bit while walking.

A normal walking motion uses the arms to counterbalance the leg motion. A walker can add power and speed by using the arms effectively. Long, straight arms act like a long pendulum, slowing you down.

**The cure:** Bend your arms 90 degrees and swing them naturally back and forth opposite the leg motion.



Proper walking arm swing

#### **Mistake #5: Chicken Winging**

OK, you know to bend your arms when you walk. But you swing them from side to side, crossing the center of your body and extending out to endanger passersby. Or your fists come up on each swing past your breast, up even to your chin or threatening your nose.

**The cure:** Keep your elbows close to your body and swing your arms mostly back and forward, as if reaching for your wallet from a back pocket on the backstroke.

As they come forward, your hands should not cross the center line and should come up no further than your breasts.

This arm motion will give power to your walk. Your feet generally move only as fast as your arms.

This motion lets you concentrate on power from your rear leg without wasting motion in front of your body. It also looks far less silly.



### **Mistake #6: Head Down**

You are always looking down, hanging your head and staring at your feet.

**The cure:** Look up!

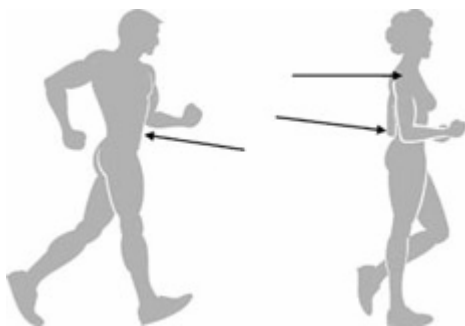
Good posture for walking allows you to breathe well and provides a long body line to prevent problems with your back, neck, and shoulders.

Chin up when walking - it should be parallel to the ground.

Your eyes should focus on the street or track 10 - 20 feet ahead. You'll avoid doggy doo-doo, find cracks in the sidewalk, spot potential hazards, and still collect the occasional coin.

How you hold your body is very important to walking comfortably and easily. With good posture you will be able to breathe easier and you will avoid back pain.

- Stand up straight.
- Think of being a tall and straight, do not arch your back.
- Do not lean forward or lean back. Leaning puts strain on the back muscles.
- Eyes forward, not looking down but rather 20 feet ahead.
- Chin up (parallel to the ground). This reduces strain on neck and back.
- Shrug once and let your shoulders fall and relax, your shoulders slightly back.
- Suck in your stomach
- Tuck in your behind - rotate your hip forward slightly. This will keep you from arching your back.



### **Mistake #7: Leaning**

- You lean forward more than 5 degrees
- You lean back.
- You have a sway back with or without a forward lean.

Somewhere you read to lean forward when walking. Or, you may be leaning back on your hips. Leaning forward or backwards or holding your back swayed can all result in back pain and do not contribute to speed or good technique.

**The cure:** Stand up straight but with relaxed shoulders, chin up and parallel to the ground. Think about walking tall. Think "suck in your gut, tuck in your butt."

Your back should have a natural curve, do not force it into an unnatural sway with behind out back stomach out forward.

Strengthen your abdominal muscles through sit-ups and other exercises so you are able to hold yourself straighter.



Do not walk with a forward lean

#### **Mistake #8: The Wrong Clothes**

- You walk at night wearing dark colored clothing with no reflective stripes or a safety vest.
- You are always wearing too much or not enough, end up sweaty and clammy in any weather.
- No hat.

**The cure:** To prevent becoming a hood ornament, wear a mesh reflective safety vest bought at a local biking or running shop or put reflective strips on your night-time walking outfit. Many running shoes have reflective elements, but studies show it is best to have several reflective elements on to be seen from all directions.

**For walking comfort, dress in layers.** The inner layer should be of a fabric such as CoolMax or polypropylene that will wick sweat away from your body to evaporate - not cotton, which holds it in next to the skin.

The next layer should be insulating - a shirt or sweater easily removed if you warm up. The outer layer should be a jacket that is windproof, and waterproof or water-resistant in wet climates.

**Hats are essential equipment.** They insulate you so you warm up faster. They shield the top of your head from the sun - an area where it is hard to apply sunscreen unless you are bald, but still burns. Hats with visors also shield your face from sun exposure.

#### **Mistake #9: Not Drinking Enough**

You don't drink enough water before, during, and after walking.

**The cure:** Drink a glass of water every hour throughout the day to stay hydrated. Ten minutes before your walk, drink a glass of water.

During your walk drink a cup or more of water every 20 minutes.

After you finish, drink a glass or two of water.

Avoid caffeinated beverages before your walk; they cause you to lose fluid, making you thirstier as well as making you take inconvenient stops along the way.

On walks over 2 hours, use an electrolyte-replacement sports drink and drink when thirsty.

On long distance walks, drink when thirsty and be sure to replenish salt with a sports drink rather than drinking only water.

### **Mistake #10: Overtraining**

You walk and walk and walk. But you have lost your enthusiasm. You feel tired, irritable. You always have aches and pains. You may be overdoing it.

**The cure:** Take a break.

Take a day off now and then to let your body repair, build up muscle, and store up some energy to get you back on the road again. If you just can't stand a true day off, do some upper body weight training instead of walking and lower body work.