

Top 2 Secrets to Banishing Boredom

Try walking at different paces – some fast, some slow – during your workout. Add some hills to your route. You'll work harder going up and get a little relief going down. Stay indoors one day and go outdoors the next. Or try different types of walking like the ones below.

Find Fun and Fitness on the Trail

To get more out of your outdoor walks, try taking a hike. Get into the woods or out in the country, and walk the trails instead of the sidewalks. The more rugged terrain requires more exertion, and you'll probably discover muscles you never knew you had.

Lots of parks and preserves feature hiking trails that range from easy walks to expert climbs. Check out the closest national, state, country, or even city park. Whenever you go, the beauty and peacefulness of nature will be an added bonus to the exercise you get.

Some tips for new hikers:

1. Plan to go about half the distance you usually walk. Rough ground, abrupt inclines, and obstacles like trees and rocks will give you a more challenging workout than you're used to.
2. At first, just go down a trail a certain distance and then turn around and come back. That way, you'll have a better idea where you are and how long you've been gone. Later on, you can graduate to circle routes that bring you back to the starting point.
3. Pay extra attention to your shoes when hiking. It's easy to get blisters and chaffing on uneven surfaces with shoes that don't fit well. You can probably use your regular walking shoes, but make sure they have good ankle support. Consider hiking boots if you will be out more than two or three hours.
4. For longer hikes, you'll want to take maps, water bottles, food, and various equipment with you. Carry them in a fanny pack or a small day pack – the extra weight will add to your exercise.
5. Take along a walking stick for better balance and support on the trail.

The ultimate "walk in the park" is overnight backpacking – carrying food, tents, and sleeping bags. The added weight and longer time spent hiking means more exercise. It also requires better conditioning before you start, but you can do it if you gradually work yourself into shape.

The payoff is the exhilaration that comes from demanding exercise and the satisfaction of getting somewhere you thought you couldn't go. So, for a simple, easy exercise program, start walking. And, whether it takes you to the sidewalks, the gym, or the woods, you'll feel better and have a good time getting there. Happy trails!

Power up to your heart and lungs

Once your workout becomes second nature, you may want to raise the challenge with power walking. It's not as intense as racewalking, where you compete to see who walks fastest, but it's a good way to challenge your body to do even more than it's used to. Power walking won't help you lose any more weight per mile, but it will do wonders for your heart and lungs.

The first thing to keep in mind is that you walk much faster. You need to take shorter steps and keep a smooth stride. Next, you add more ambitious arm movements. As you walk faster, pump your arms higher – to chest or neck level. Working your arms is just as good as working your legs, so now you're doing double-duty.

Carrying additional weight will boost your calorie burn. You can supplement your own weight in the following ways if you're not prone to back or joint injuries.

1. Hand weights. Carrying small dumbbells while you work your arms is like doing curls – one repetition per stride. Don't use weights heavier than 2 pounds, though – you could strain your shoulders.

2. Weighted gloves. You don't have to grip these weights, which mean more relaxed arms and shoulders. Plus, you can't drop them.

3. Weight vest. This is more expensive, but you can carry more weight and distribute the load to both your upper-and lower-body muscles.

Another way to supplement your power walking is to use poles or walking sticks. Moving the poles along with your feet makes your arms work more and gives your heart a better workout. Since they help support you, you don't feel like you're working any harder. Be sure to use them, though – it doesn't do much good to just carry them.

You can also change the surface you walk on. Walking through grass or soft dirt is tougher than cruising along on the pavement. Combine great exercise with a great vacation by going to California or Cancun or somewhere else with beautiful beaches. Walking in the sand will burn a lot more calories.

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