



Embracing Active Travel for Health

Factsheet: Walking

Walking for active travel

Walking is a time saver

If you walk more of your everyday trips then you don't need to find more time to fit exercise in as well.

Walking is easy to do

Put one foot in front of the other and keep going. You don't need any special equipment, to join a gym, buy a ticket or do any training, just step out your front door, off the bus or up from your desk and go.



Photo credit: Harry Schiffer (Eltis)

Walking is the easy way to link with public transport services and thus destinations at greater distances.

Walking enables independent travel for everyone in our communities.

Walking makes you healthier and happier

It is one of the easiest, safest and least expensive type of exercise to promote good mental and physical health

Walking connects you with your community

Walking locally not only enables you to go places but provides opportunities for chance meetings and interactions with your neighbours and to support local retailers.

What is at stake?

An inactive person spends 37% more days in hospital and visits the doctor 5.5% more often. (1)

The cost to the National Health Service in the UK of physical inactivity was estimated in 2007 at between £1 billion and £1.8 billion. (2)

Physical activity deficiency is one of the leading risk factors for ill-health in the 53 Member States in the World Health Organisation (WHO) European Region, where nearly 1 million deaths/year are estimated to be attributable to physical inactivity. (3)

Mental ill health accounts for almost 20% of the burden of disease in the WHO European Region and mental health problems affect one in four people at some time in life. Six out of the 20 countries with the highest suicide rates in the world are in the European Region. (4)

Air pollution is a major environmental risk to health, adding to the burden of disease from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases, including asthma. (5)

Urban mobility accounts for 40% of all CO₂ emissions from road transport and up to 70% of other pollutants from transport (6)

Traffic congestion in the EU costs nearly 100 billion Euro or 1% of GDP annually and contributes to air pollution levels. (6)



What are the public health benefits of walking?

- Regular walking can increase your basal metabolic rate - which is the rate when you are resting - enabling your body to process energy more effectively overall.
- Brisk walking, uphill or higher intensity walking delivers even greater health benefits
- Walking is a low impact weight bearing exercise which means it helps maintain bone density as you age, working against osteoporosis, hip fractures and joint weakness.
- Regular physical activity can improve mental health among people with serious mental illness. Improvements in quality of life and emotional well-being due to physical activity have been reported even in the absence of objective diagnostic improvement. (7)
- Walking is accessible to everyone from the young to the elderly, is low cost and highly sociable.
- Walking can reduce congestion in towns and occupies only the space of the person - nothing to park, leave behind (or trip over) when you get to your destination.
- The lower the levels of air pollution, the better the cardiovascular and respiratory health of the population will be, both long- and short-term. (5)
- More walking can reduce the cost of providing health services. Costs to the health service of inactivity are multiplying every year!



Photo credit: Harry Schiffer (Eltis)

References and examples:

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