



We walked off three stone in four weeks! How five Mail readers beat the bulge by walking 5,000 steps a day

- **Sports scientist Joanna Hall teaches a way to walk that aligns the body**
- **The technique can help alleviate back pain and help shed the excess pounds**
- **Five Mail readers were chosen to take part in a four week walking challenge**
- **Each shed pounds and has seen an array of other health benefits**

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It's a unique challenge: lose up to 10lb simply by walking every day. Two months ago, The Mail on Sunday asked readers to try. Fitness guru Joanna Hall promised it was possible – if you followed her guidelines on how to walk correctly.

Hundreds contacted us to say they were willing to give it a go, and five volunteers were chosen. Each had an initial training session and a series of medical checks at BMI The London Independent Hospital.

They were tested again after four weeks of walking 5,000 steps a day – Here, they chart their journey, while cardiovascular epidemiologist and obesity specialist Dr David Ashton, consultant cardiologist Dr T. W. Koh and GP Dr Jonty Heaversedge give their analyses.



Five volunteers - pictured from left to right, Kerry McIvor, Tony Butterworth, Barbara Carter-Dunn, Kathryn Davis and Diane Green - took up the four week challenge and saw extraordinary results

THE WALKACTIVE CHALLENGE

The volunteers first learned Joanna's Walkactive technique, which promises postural, functional and cosmetic improvements. Each read her book, watched her DVD and took part in a one-day workshop with her.

For the first three days, each volunteer had to note their average number of steps. They then had to walk a minimum of 5,000 steps a day using Joanna's technique. This could be broken into three or four walks and included normal walking around.

Each wore a pedometer to measure their progress and, in weeks one and two, they also did three 'pace walks' – fast enough that they were lightly out of breath.

The length of the walk depended on individual fitness levels. In weeks three and four, they did four pace walks.

There were also daily abdominal exercises that involved drawing the stomach muscles upward and inward and holding for various lengths of time.



TOTAL WEIGHT LOSS: 5 POUNDS			
	Before	After	
Weight	11.8	11.3	▼
BMI	29.1	28.1	▼
Body fat percentage	38.2	36.2	▼
Blood pressure	102/77	104/71	▲
Pulse rate	74	66	▼
Cholesterol	4.52	4.37	▼
Waist	34.5	33	▼

TOTAL WEIGHT LOSS: 1 STONE			
	Before	After	
Weight	14.7	13.7	▼
BMI	30.6	28.6	▼
Body fat percentage	31.3	24.6	▼
Blood pressure	112/82	126/86	▲
Pulse rate	90	67	▼
Cholesterol	3.82	4.27	▲
Waist	44.2	40.1	▼

'I WALK FIVE MILES EVERY MORNING'

Tony Butterworth, 65:

Tony lives in Halifax, West Yorkshire, with his wife Jocelyn, 58, a nurse. They have two grown-up children. Tony, a retired NHS administrator, says: 'I've always considered myself to be a reasonably active person.

'My older grandchildren, who are aged nine and seven, think I exist to play football with them. But I put on weight in 2005 and started to worry about my health.

'I was diagnosed with two slipped discs so exercise that wasn't going to hurt my joints sounded ideal. I started at 5,000 paces and built up. Now I walk five miles every morning and I thoroughly enjoy it.

'When I saw my results written down in black and white, I was thrilled. I leap out of bed in the morning, I have more energy and I'm a stone lighter. There is no pain in my joints, and I'll be carrying on.'

Dr Koh: 'The drop in Tony's resting pulse rate would need to be measured over a period of time to show a sustained decrease, but it is potentially good news. His cholesterol has gone up, but without the breakdown of how much is "bad" and "good", it is difficult to draw conclusions.'

Dr Ashton says: 'The loss around Tony's waist is impressive. It is fat that is strongly associated with heart disease and type 2 diabetes. His reductions in glucose and pulse rate are consistent with increased physical activity.'

Dr Heaversedge says: 'At the start, Tony was obese but now is approaching a healthy BMI. It is unsurprising that his joint pain has lessened. Walking correctly can ease joint pain by strengthening muscles around them.'

Kathryn Davis, 47:

Kathryn lives in Solihull, West Midlands, with her husband Richard, 58, and their two daughters, Ellie, 19, and Grace, 14. She works for Birmingham City Council.

Kathryn says: 'I just hoped to lose a few pounds and get a bit fitter. I found it invigorating and quickly felt that I was sleeping better and waking up fresh.'

'I've managed to build up to 15,000 steps a day getting up early in the morning and going for a walk before the weather warmed up. In the evening I'd go for a walk where previously I'd take the car. I feel so much better, and I'm over the moon that my waistline has reappeared.'



Lowered cholesterol: Diane Green, 60, pictured left, has managed to lower her cholesterol level and lose nearly 4in from her waist while Kathryn Davis, 47, pictured right, has built up to walking 15,000 steps a day and says her waistline has reappeared

TOTAL WEIGHT LOSS: 9 POUNDS			
	Before	After	
Weight	9.4	8.9	▼
BMI	24.3	23	▼
Body fat percentage	28.7	24.2	▼
Blood pressure	120/75	127/72	▲
Pulse rate	88	52	▼
Cholesterol	6.48	6.02	▼
Waist	34	30.3	▼

TOTAL WEIGHT LOSS: 9 POUNDS			
	Before	After	
Weight	19.4	18.9	▼
BMI	43.1	42.1	▼
Body fat percentage	50.8	47.3	▼
Blood pressure	120/88	121/91	▲
Pulse rate	92	96	▲
Cholesterol	4.5	5.11	▲
Waist	50	44	▼

Dr Koh says: 'After four weeks of exercise Kathryn's body fat is down by seven per cent, her BMI by three per cent and her waist by 12 per cent. These are all significant measurements. Imagine the impact after six months or a year of such exercise.'

'Kathryn's waist circumference – a measure of her abdominal fat – has also come down by 6in, which is significant.'

HOW YOU CAN MASTER THE METHOD...

IN FOUR SIMPLE STEPS

Getting started

Aim to walk for 15 to 20 minutes three or four times a week, and start picking up your pace to increase the health benefits.

Wear an accurate pedometer to count steps - there is no set number but you should be aiming to walk at your optimum pace.

This is the fastest pace at which you can walk without compromising the technique - as you improve, you will notice the number

of steps you take per minute will naturally increase. If you become stiff and tensed, slow down. Once you are confident with the technique, walk faster.

Before you start, warm up slowly by going through the technique from toe to head. Overriding your natural walking style will take time - my method will feel strange for a few weeks, so be patient. At first you'll have to concentrate and it

will feel like hard work, but soon you'll be able to do it without thinking.

Don't rush - you're undoing years of incorrect walking. Learn the technique and incorporate it into everyday life.

I recommend the barefoot range of trainers from Merrell (merrell.com, from £75), but plimsolls will do just as well. The foot will spread naturally in your shoe, so you need flexibility.

1 Neck and shoulders

THE PROBLEM

Shoulder slump and tension - from handbags, carrying small children and hunching through stress. It contributes to shoulder, neck and back pain. Your head weighs 12lb and is easy for your body to support when in the correct position. When hunched over a computer, it becomes much harder to support. The muscles of the upper back contract to hold your head in that position, and this causes discomfort.

THE SOLUTION

- Imagine lengthening the space between earlobes and shoulder. This brings the head back into the correct anatomical position so the muscles can relax more.
- Relax the shoulders down - therefore relieving tension in the back. This also allows the shoulder girdle to move and gives more fluid motion of the body.
- Relax your neck. A tense neck exacerbates the head being in the wrong position and tightens the back muscles, therefore constricting the lungs. Relaxing the neck enables a more natural breathing pattern. When people first start to exercise, one reason for shortness of breath is poor posture rather than lack of fitness.

2 Arms and hands

THE PROBLEM

Too often we tense up and do a mechanical looking march - with clenched fists, tight shoulders and arms swinging rigidly.

THE SOLUTION

- Bend and relax arms and move them backwards and forwards. Initially do this at a right angle, and then as you increase in confidence, at 120 degrees so that you open up the shoulder girdle (the bony arch formed by the collarbones and shoulder blades), pushing back much further rather than forward.
- Create natural rotation with each arm swing: this is engaging the oblique (waist) muscles and whittling the waist down as it swivels from side to side.
- Keep fists loose. Any tensing up limits correct shoulder positioning.

Don't tense your stomach - and relax your buttocks

4 Pelvis and hips

THE PROBLEM

Upper body weight is often carried wrongly in the hips -

