

HOW TO WALK

Whether you are out for a Sunday stroll or climbing a mountain, follow our expert tips to make each step more comfortable and efficient – and avoid injury in the process

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I am not questioning your ability to walk. It's probably something you do for hours every week. In the same way, I wouldn't question your ability to kick a ball. It's not that difficult, is it? But if you were intending to dribble the ball a lot and hoping to score a few goals, you might accept some coaching, mightn't you?

These two things – walking and footballing – are essentially learned skills. And, like all learned skills, they have the potential for improvement.



BEST FOOT FORWARD

When done well, walking is a particularly graceful and elegant way of getting around. In other words, it can be done with very little effort (try crawling for comparison!).

We walk by allowing ourselves to fall forwards a little and then 'catching' ourselves with one foot. And then with the other foot. Left, right, left, right, until we reach our destination.

As your foot catches your fall, the weight of your body passes down through that foot. If you place your feet too far to either side of your line of travel, you will waste energy in moving your body side to side rather than forwards.

It's easy to check your gait when walking on a beach or through puddles on an otherwise dry pavement. Look back at your footprints and imagine a straight line through your direction of travel. Your heels should each have touched that line, in turn, with every step.

If that isn't the case, bear in mind that any adjustments require a light touch. This

READER PANEL



'I damaged my knee ligaments with careless stretching, so I take much more care now. I use two – never just one – walking poles to improve my gait when I'm going uphill and to reduce shock on my knees when coming steeply downhill. The poles were particularly useful in taking the strain when the pain was at its greatest.'

Dave Cavanagh, Vale of White Horse Ramblers, Oxfordshire

is 'tweaking', not 'twerking'! The thought of walking along a narrow plank, concentrating on your midline, may help you adopt a more efficient technique.

HEADS UP

Enough about the feet. What about the effect of what we do at the head end?

We tend to go in the direction we are looking. For most people this means literally 'following your nose'. So, if you look at the horizon while you walk, you are more

