



HOW CAN I USE A Pedometer TO HELP ME TO BE ACTIVE?

A pedometer is a device that counts the number of steps you take when you walk or run. Some pedometers count only the number of steps you take. Others also estimate the total distance covered or calories burned. You can wear a pedometer all day, every day, or just when you're going out for a walk.

How a pedometer works

Most pedometers have a small metal arm inside that moves each time you take a step. This movement is recorded as a step on the pedometer's display.

What to look for in a pedometer

When you're buying a pedometer, look for one that:

- counts steps accurately (walk 20 steps with the pedometer on – the display should read 19, 20, or 21 if it is accurate)
- has a cover to protect the display
- includes a belt clip or strap so the pedometer doesn't fall off when you wear it
- uses an inexpensive battery (such as a watch battery).

Many drug stores and sports shops sell pedometers. You can also check with your local library or recreation organizations to see if they have a pedometer lending program.

How to wear a pedometer

A pedometer must be upright to work properly. In other words, the pedometer should not be resting at an angle to your body.

Clip your pedometer to the waistband of your pants or skirt at the midpoint of your leg (lined up with your kneecap). If your waistband is loose, you can clip the pedometer to the inside of it for a snugger fit.

Depending on what you wear or your body shape, you may need to try other ways of wearing your pedometer. Test your pedometer to make sure it's counting your steps accurately.

Let's get moving!

When it's worn properly, you can use a pedometer to:

- Get an idea of how active you are. Put on the pedometer when you get up in the morning, and take it off just before bedtime. Record the number of steps you take each day for three days (two workdays and one day you don't work). Add up the number of steps and divide by three to get the average. Compare your results to the following:

◇Active adults take approximately 7,000 to 13,000 steps per day.

◇Active older adults take approximately 6,000 to 8,500 steps per day.

◇Inactive adults take approximately 3,500 to 5,000 steps per day.

◇Children should take approximately 11,000 to 13,000 steps per day.

- Help you to set goals for being active. Increase your activity in manageable bites. If you normally take about 3,000 steps a day, then your initial goal might be to try to reach 6,000 steps a day. You can do this in three 10-minute bouts of brisk walking (about 1,000 to 1,300 steps at a time).
- Measure your progress. Record (PDF reader required) the number of steps you take to track your progress, so that you know when it's time to set a new goal. For example, once you're consistently taking 6,000 steps a day, you could change your goal to 8,000 and then to 10,000 steps or more per day.

What pedometers can't do

- Pedometers are most accurate in counting steps. They are less accurate for estimating distance travelled and calories burned.
- Pedometers record a step each time your hip moves up and down. This means the pedometer measures other things you do in addition to walking (e.g., bending to tie your shoes, riding in a car).
- Pedometers don't measure the frequency (how often), intensity (how hard) or duration (how long) you've been physically active. For example, a pedometer can't tell the difference between walking, running or climbing stairs.
- A pedometer can't measure your activity level when you swim, bike or do an exercise where you use just your arms. As a general rule:
 - ◇10 minutes of moderate intensity activity = 1,000 steps
 - ◇10 minutes of high intensity activity = 2,000 steps.

Wheelchair users can attach an odometer from a bike shop to their chairs to track the distance they travel. (1 km = about 1,250 steps).

Additional resources

- Pedometer information sheet: Get Physically Active One Step at a Time! – Alberta Centre for Active Living
- Stepping up your physical activity: Walking to improve your health – Canadian Health Network

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