A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a light-colored jacket and dark boots, is walking a dog on a leash in a field. The dog is a beagle-like breed, sniffing the ground. The background shows a hazy landscape with hills under a blue sky. The entire image has a blue tint.

3 Easy Steps

TO START WALKING MORE
COMFORTABLY & CONFIDENTLY

*A guide on how to optimize
your walking for health,
fitness and safety*

WWW.ZOOMERSHEALTH.CA

*"If you don't take
time for your
wellness, you will be
forced to take time
for your illness."*

JOYCE SUNADA

What does walking well mean and why does it matter?

We often take our ability to walk for granted. Even more than that, many of us assume that if we are still able to walk, that is sufficient to maintain mobility and independence.

However, walking well means more than being able to get from “point A to point B”; it requires moving with adequate quality to help safeguard against future injury.

Walking well helps us to continue doing the activities we love including being outdoors and spending time with friends and family. In fact, the quality of our walking can fairly accurately predict our future health status and physical independence.



The great news is that many of the aspects of our walking quality are modifiable. By paying attention to how we are moving, we can optimize our own walking habits and set ourselves up to live the life we love for as long as possible.

At Zoomers, we have an educated and experienced staff. We are passionate about providing focused services that promote and support active healthy aging. We are committed to keeping you engaged in the activities you love by meeting your healthcare and fitness needs.

Do you want to know how you can put more pep in your step? Enjoy the next few pages on how you can live the life you love by creating a successful walking program!

Learn how to



STEP 1

Assess your own walking quality



STEP 2

Improve your walking with strength



STEP 3

Safely start or progress your walking program

How to assess your own walking quality

STEP 1

WHEN EVALUATING WALKING QUALITY, OUR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS LOOK AT MANY FACTORS, INCLUDING:

STEPPING PATTERN

SPEED

AGILITY

STEP SIZE

STEADINESS

Some of these factors are best assessed using standardized tests to determine your status. However, you can quite easily assess two of these factors your own. Read on to learn how to check your own stepping pattern and speed to begin to better understand how well you're walking.

STEPPING PATTERN

When walking with good quality, the first contact with the ground should be with the heel of the foot. After the heel contacts the ground, the pressure should roll to the front of the foot to push off the ball of the foot, near the big toe. This is called the heel-to-toe pattern and is the ideal pattern for walking stability and speed.

How can you assess your own stepping pattern when out for a walk? Consciously think about when and where you feel the contact between your foot and the ground with each step. Or you can have a friend take a recording with their phone/camera and then watch the movement of your foot on the video.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING YOURSELF:

- Does my heel hit the ground before the middle of my foot?
- Do I clearly push off my toes?



SPEED

Gait (also known as walking) speed is recognized as an important predictor of future health status. It is an assessment we should all be doing regularly to monitor for change.

The next time you're out for a walk, time how many seconds it takes you "comfortably but quickly" to walk 10 meters on flat ground. Then use this simple formula to determine your

walking speed and compare it to the table below to see how you compare to the average for someone your age.:

$$\text{Gait speed} = \frac{10 \text{ (meters)}}{\text{\# of seconds}}$$

Checking your gait speed periodically to monitor for change is also a helpful tool. If you are slowing down or have other concerns, seek further guidance from a physiotherapist.

Table 1. Normal gait speeds for healthy community-dwelling men and women.¹¹

Age (years)	Gender	Average Gait Speed (m/s)
30-39	Men	1.43
	Women	1.34
40-49	Men	1.43
	Women	1.39
50-59	Men	1.43
	Women	1.31
60-69	Men	1.34
	Women	1.24
70-79	Men	1.26
	Women	1.13
80-89	Men	0.97
	Women	0.94

Reference:
<https://lermagazine.com/article/self-selected-gait-speed-a-critical-clinical-outcome>

How to improve your walking with strength

STEP 2



After the age of 40, our bodies lose 1-2% of their muscle strength each year. This means, over the course of a decade, your body could lose 10-20% of its muscle strength. The great news is that muscle strength is almost always trainable and can be improved at any age (with only very few, rare, exceptions)!

Muscle strength is of particular importance to walking quality and is often overlooked. The primary muscles involved in optimal walking quality include the gluteals (buttocks), quadriceps, core (abdominals/lower back) and calves. The strength of these muscles is what allows you to have optimal gait speed, tolerance for hills and longer periods of activity.

Walking alone doesn't provide enough challenge to the muscles to maintain optimal strength. It requires regular strength training, 2-3 times per week. Here are a few exercises that can be done at home quite easily to optimize the strength in these muscles:

SIT-TO-STAND

HEEL RAISE

BRIDGE

ELEVATED PLANK

STANDING HIP ABDUCTION

It is important to have an individualized assessment to determine which exercises are safest and most appropriate for you. At Zoomers, we will take your past and current injuries or issues into consideration while we assess your strength, flexibility and balance. This ensures that your exercise program is designed for maximum benefit and minimum risk.



How to start or progress your walking program

STEP 3

Walking is great exercise. It is accessible, relatively inexpensive and something that most of us have at least “dabbled with” in the past. However, there are a few important tips to keep in mind to reduce the likelihood of “running” into trouble in your walking program.

HOW TO GET STARTED

When starting a walking program, it is important to start at a relatively easy level

and gradually increase the difficulty of the program.

If you have not been active but feel confident with your walking stability, consider starting with walking 15-20 minutes, 3 times per week for 2 weeks.

If you are already engaged in a walking program and are looking to increase the intensity of your program, consider increasing your distance (or duration) by no more than 10% per week.

That gradual increase can help ensure that the muscles and joints in your body have adequate time to adjust to the added strain.

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR ROUTE

Firm-packed paths or trails provide an optimal surface for comfort and safety while walking. The slight “give” of the ground reduces the stress on your back/hips/knees/feet; the smooth terrain also reduces the likelihood of catching your toe on a tree root or rolling your ankle on the unpredictability of the sidewalk.

Walking when and where there is good visibility and limited distraction can help reduce the chance of unexpected mis-steps. Consider not only the time of day but also how much visual distraction is along the route (ie: moving cars, other pedestrians, cyclists etc).

HOW TO INCREASE THE INTENSITY OF YOUR WALKING PROGRAM

A few simple ways you can increase the demand of your walking program include:

- Adding hills
- Adding short intervals of faster walking
- Adding an extra loop
- Stopping periodically and doing strength exercises
- Adding nordic walking poles

DID YOU KNOW?

Nordic poles increase your muscle use by more than **40%** while you walk!

As an added bonus, they can **increase stability** and **offload painful joints** to allow you to progress your walks.

Choosing to incorporate any one of these options benefits your body by increasing the work for your heart, lungs and muscles.

Adding variety into your program can also make it easier to stick to your plan by making each walk feel a bit different.

Keep at it!

As we stated at the beginning of this guide, the ability to walk well is often something we take for granted. Whether you are looking to improve your walking in your daily activities or you're interested in progressing a walking program, it is important to first assess the quality of your walking and address any underlying factors that are limiting your ability to move optimally.

Once you are armed with that information and an action plan, you will be ready to move more confidently and safely in every step you take!

NOW ASK YOURSELF...



Do I feel confident in my walking program?



Do I think I would benefit from a little help along the way?

Read on to find out how we can help!

Fit For Life Program

Designed just for YOU!

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

One of our experienced physiotherapists will meet you in-clinic or at home with our virtual (online video conference) services. Together you will discuss:

- activities you are currently doing
- any areas of concern you have
- your activity goals

Your physiotherapist will complete an individualized screening for walking quality, strength, balance, and mobility. If there are any areas of concern, we will create a treatment plan for you to minimize risk of injury.

Think of the Fit For Life Program like your semi-annual Doctor's checkup. We want to make sure you are living well 365 days a year.

It's important to check in on your health instead of waiting for something to go wrong!

ACTION PLAN

Based on the results of your assessment, you may choose to:

- follow an individualized program at home
- join one of our fun small group fitness classes
- combine independent and group work

Your physiotherapist will create a personalized home exercise program – specific to your needs! You will even get special access to a free app that will show you narrated videos of each of your exercises; it will include tips from your physiotherapist to help you get the most out of each movement!

REPEAT!

You will meet with your physiotherapist every 6 months to ensure you are ready for the activities coming in the months ahead. Making sure you never miss a golf season or a ski hill!

Want to know more?

We all deserve to live a life we love...
sometimes we just need a little help
along the way.

We can't wait to meet you and help you
get to where you want to be!

REACH OUT TO US

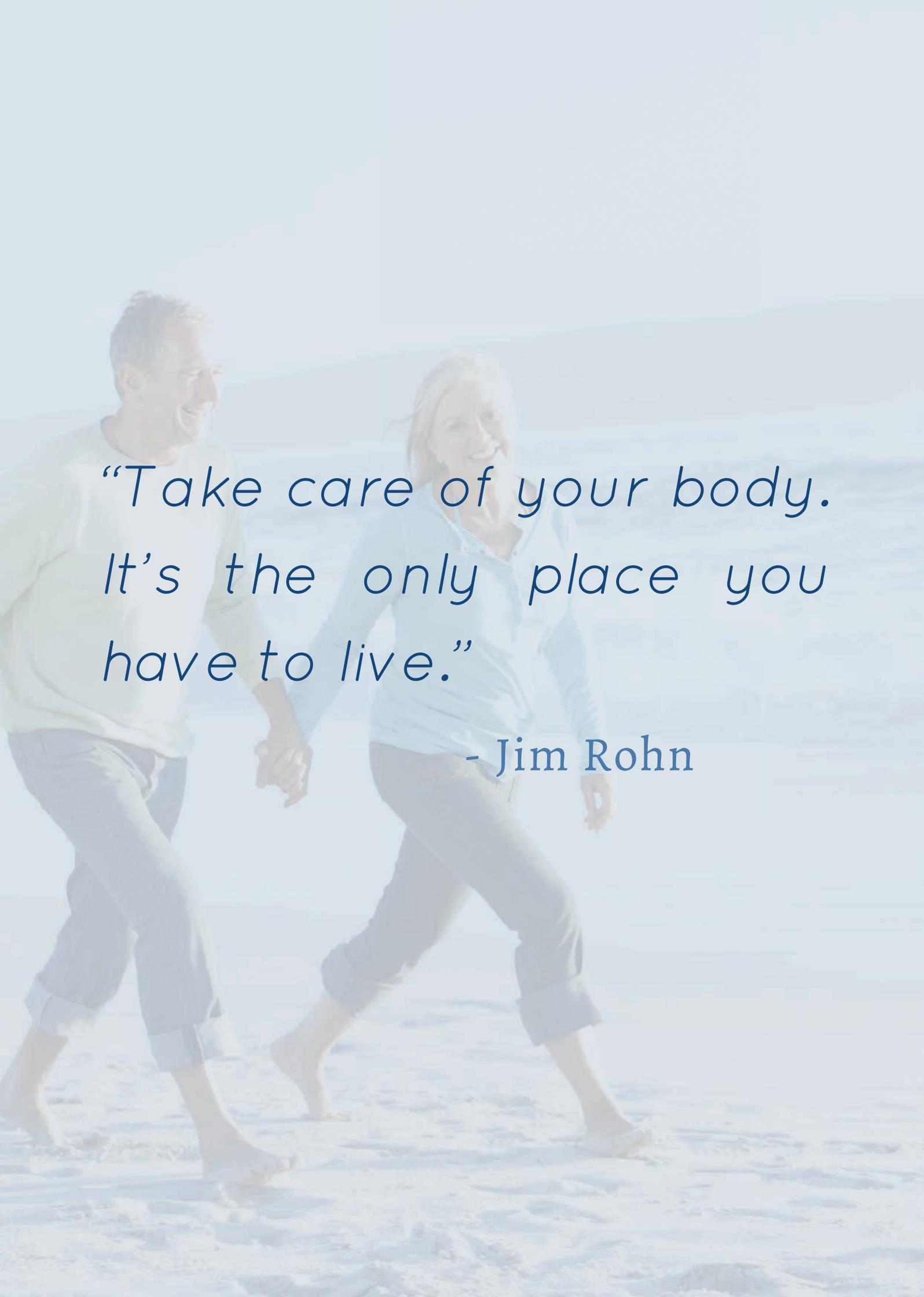


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A man and a woman are walking barefoot on a sandy beach, holding hands and smiling. The man is on the left, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The woman is on the right, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The background shows the ocean and a hazy horizon. The quote is overlaid in a blue, cursive font.

*“Take care of your body.
It’s the only place you
have to live.”*

- Jim Rohn