

# **assessing health benefits from walking**

**the need to be cautious:** Although the General Practice Physical Activity Questionnaire (GPPAQ) asks about walking, DIY, green exercise and housework, the answers are not initially included in the final score. This is because, during validation of the questionnaire, it became clear that it was hard for people to accurately estimate the quantity and intensity of their walking. To make sure that people are gaining the best health benefits from exercise, it is important to ask further questions about the amount of time spent walking and the effort involved.

When people report that they walk regularly, but their Physical Activity Index (PAI) is less than *Active*, it's usually helpful to explore a bit more thoroughly the quantity and intensity of their walking. This will help to determine whether they are currently meeting the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation for 30 minutes of moderate activity on 5 days of the week (or more).

**further questions about walking:** People who fall within the inactive category, but report significant amounts of walking may require a modified, brief intervention that explores their understanding of walking and walking pace and how they have estimated the amount of walking accumulated during the last week. The dialogue could begin in the following kind of way:

*"You say you do three hours or more of walking per week. So that I might better understand how walking fits into your day, perhaps you could talk me through a typical day for you, starting from when you get up in the morning right through to when you go to bed telling me where walking fits in. How about yesterday, could you talk me through yesterday?"*

If the previous day was atypical, use the day before that. Try to avoid going too far back as the accuracy of recall will be diminished. The practitioner's task in this exercise is simply to listen, without offering any judgement of what is being said. This is not further assessment of the patient's activity. The aim is to get the person talking about their current behaviour in a non-threatening (the threat of being told to change) environment that will build rapport and conveys that the practitioner listens and is genuinely interested in their situation. Once they have completed the description of their day the practitioner should simply summarise the information on walking and then proceed to ... motivation and confidence questions ... as appropriate.

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To assess walking intensity, use the following guidelines:

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- 0.) breathing easily, conversation is easy.
  - 1.) breathing lightly and talking easily but heart rate increases.
  - 2.) still talking comfortably but breathing more quickly & body warming up.
  - 3.) breathing more deeply & harder, talking with a little more difficulty.
  - 4.) breathing very hard & short of breath, cannot carry on a conversation.
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*0 to 1, Light activity      2 to 3, Moderate Activity      4, Vigorous Activity*

One needs to be walking at intensity *2 to 3* for it to count towards one's activity level.

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