

Fact Sheet

Parks and Walking for health

Walking is an easy, free, accessible and inclusive form of exercise that has numerous mental, physical and social health benefits, including building muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, balance and mobility, boosting mood and regulating blood pressure. Walking in green spaces such as parks has been demonstrated to provide additional benefits for both the mind and body, such as improved immune system functioning, a decrease in stress hormones, and lowering health risks associated with diseases such as cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes.

The benefits of walking

Walking, including with the use of a mobility aid, has a multitude of benefits for our mental, physical and social health and wellbeing. As a weight-bearing form of exercise it improves strength, flexibility and mobility. It helps regulate blood pressure, blood sugar levels and mood. It helps in maintaining a healthy weight. It can also increase our social connection when walking with a companion or group.

Walking is free and easy to incorporate into a daily or weekly routine, be it a gentle stroll or more vigorous pace. It has been [identified](#) that many people with cardiovascular disease can benefit from introducing activity such as walking to improve their health, lower cardiovascular risk profiles and symptoms and improve muscle fitness, under the supervision of their treating health professional. Similarly, there have been [recommendations](#) that people with type 2 diabetes incorporate regular physical activity such as walking due to its many relevant benefits, such as assisting in maintaining a healthy weight, increased energy levels, improved mood and reducing the risk of developing diabetes complications.

Walking has been demonstrated to [improve cognitive function](#) and decrease cognitive decline in older adults. Walking has also [been shown](#) to support both treatment and prevention of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression as it increases self-esteem, boosts mood and reduces stress.

Parks are part of the solution

It has been widely [demonstrated](#) that walking in parks has physiological, psychological and social benefits for health. Studies have shown that walking in green spaces not only boosts mood and decreases physiological signs of [stress](#) but can also improve [immune system](#) functioning. Additionally, walking in nature can foster social support networks, social inclusion and a sense of community. Walking in green spaces has been demonstrated to improve mood and decrease stress in [teens](#) and [older adults](#). Studies have shown that walking in nature can support the physical, mental and social wellbeing of those living with [dementia](#) as well as their carers. Walking along with more targeted activity can potentially support a holistic approach to recuperation and rehabilitation following injuries.

Doctors in Japan often recommend 'forest bathing' or shinrin-yoku - the act of immersing yourself in nature by walking in natural settings for its restorative effects on mental health and

wellbeing. Forest bathing has been prescribed to improve physical health, including the immune system, as well as benefitting the spirit and instilling a sense of psychological relaxation.



Image credit: Parks Victoria

Next steps

Victoria's national, state and urban parks provide beautiful settings for our community to improve their physical, social and mental health and wellbeing across all life stages through walking. Some walking activities that should be considered include:

Park walks: organised guided walks support people to improve their health in a relaxing nature-based setting. Volunteer-led walks for all abilities are offered throughout Victoria.

Volunteering: Volunteer as a Park Walk Leader and improve your health while supporting others to embrace walking in your local park.

Mindfulness walks: Parks are an excellent setting for self-guided and guided mindfulness walks.

Self-guided walks: there are hundreds of tracks and trails in parks across the state. Check our website for recommended trails and for accessibility information.

Visit www.parks.vic.gov.au to find a park near you

- [Find out about guided Park walks](#)
- [Find volunteering opportunities in parks](#)
- [Find out more about mindfulness walks](#)
- [Health professional resources and tools](#)

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment