

GETTING STARTED

Engaging in this training plan with diligence may surprise you. It could increase your overall strength and endurance as well as your interoception (sense of the internal states of your body). You might also begin to enjoy the powerful medicine of being outside.

Disclaimer: I am not an athletic trainer. However, I've lived and worked in and through the body for 30 years. In the course of 63 years I've been a dancer, a martial artist, a massage therapist, a competitive runner, an avid backpacker, a practitioner of Authentic Movement and a big fan of yoga. I've dealt with my own injuries and the related recovery process many times. I've supported women for many years training and staying healthy and strong on backpacking and trekking trips.

Nonetheless, if you have any questions or concerns please consult your doctor, a physical therapist or an athletic trainer.

First: This is a gradual and incremental training guide. It develops three interconnected systems of the body - all of which are crucial to having the best time possible on this trip.

1. You will accustom your muscles and joints to walking 10 - 15 miles/day.
2. You will accustom your lungs to greater aerobic capacity so we can walk all day at a steady pace.
3. You will accustom your shoulders, backs and hips to carrying a 5-10 lb pack for 5-7 hours/day.

Since the plan gradually strengthens 3 separate variables, most weeks you'll notice incremental changes in your activities. Sometimes one variable holds steady while others increase.

Second: As you begin, I ask that you get a sense of your own natural walking pace by walking a measured mile (school tracks are 1/4 mile). How long does it take you to walk four times around the track? Might it be fun to measure that time when you start training and again in a few weeks? Can you eventually walk a mile in 20 minutes? Could you keep a pace like that for a few hours? If that pace feels too fast, please focus on the "speed interval" portion of the training. We all want to be able to walk at least a mile in 20 minutes. When we're walking 5-7 hours each day - perhaps in scorching sun, perhaps in pouring rain - you want to be able to move steadily. I love ambling but I also want to be able to move more briskly as needed.

Third: Technically this is a 10 week schedule. I suggest you begin now so you can get used to all of this with a sense of ease and confidence and have time to ease up and

rest if needed. It starts with 30 minutes of walking, three days/week. If needed, this can also help you establish a lifelong habit of regular moderate exercise.

If you haven't been walking much at all, start with 15 - 20 mins. of easy, relaxed, slow walking every other day and make sure nothing hurts before you continue.

If you've been walking or running regularly, scan through the weeks and start training at the week that matches your current level of activity.

Every time you go out to train, decide what makes sense for you based on the cues you receive from your body. Be gentle and tender with yourself. Listen carefully to your muscles and joints as you move through this plan. They will communicate in the language of sensation - discomfort, mild pain, acute pain as well as delight, exuberance and anticipation!

Fourth (FAQ):

Why walk so much during the last few weeks of this training plan?

We will be walking 10 - 15 miles each day. You may be able to manage 10 miles on a day hike, but doing that again the next day and the day after that as well is much harder on the body. We need to be able to sustain many days in a row of 5 -7 hours of walking. We want to enjoy the beautiful scenery and have energy at the end of the day to appreciate a meal and the companionship of friends.

Why work on walking faster, I like to amble?

Mostly when we go walking or even hiking we're not particularly concerned with our pace. We're just out to have fun. But when you're walking 10 - 15 miles each day, your pace matters! It could mean the difference between a 5 hour or a 7 hour day under blazing hot sun or in driving cold rain.

What's the difference between normal discomfort and pain?

You will experience discomfort (sore muscles and joints) as you get stronger. This generally feels "achey and stiff" and should ease up as you walk the next day. If you experience pain (sharp, red hot, doesn't improve with movement) you should probably ease up, rest for a day or two or even consult a health care professional.

"No pain no gain" is not a useful mindset for this kind of long term, gentle training. It would be better to do only 50 % of what I describe here than to push yourself too hard and end up injured! We want to be ready for our adventure feeling healthy, happy and strong enough.

Week 1

3 days/week:

Start with 15 - 30 minutes walking at an easy pace in the woods or on the road. Notice how you feel.

Gently stretch afterwards (especially legs and back) carefully and slowly.

Drink a full glass of water afterwards.

It generally takes about 48 hours for inflammation to reach its full potential. Be sensitive to how you feel 48 hours after your first couple of walks. Ease up if you're really sore. If you're at all concerned about the impact of walking on asphalt or if your feet or joints start to hurt, do your training in the woods. The trails are softer and the uneven surface is good practice.

IMPORTANT: Quick distinction between "warming up" and "stretching". Before exercising it is good to move all joints loosely and easily through their range of motion. You are getting the blood flowing and warming up your muscles.

AFTER exercising when your muscles are warm, it is good to stretch (not bounce) gently. Hold the stretch for 30 - 45 seconds.

Week 2

3 days/week:

Walk for 30 - 45 minutes.

Stretch and drink water after.

If feet, knees or back are uncomfortable (not sharp pain, but dull, achey pain), be sure your shoes or boots have excellent support.

If you experience any sharp pain, stop and figure out why! If you're feeling any significant, ongoing pain at this point, consider consulting a health care professional. Same is true at any point in your training. Do not ignore pain. It's your body speaking in the only language it has.

Week 3 *If you haven't bought your hiking shoes/boots yet, now is the time. You want them all broken in long before we leave.*

3 days/week

Walk for 45 minutes.

During your walks, add in 2 intervals (1 - 3 minutes) of speed (faster walking or faster running). This is fast enough you should get out of breath. It will be uncomfortable. That's okay it will only last a few minutes. Think of it as strengthening your lungs.

OR

Add in 2 hills, brisk walking, get out of breath!

OR

Add in 2 bleacher sets (@ the HS track). Go fast enough you're breathless.

Go easy on the bleachers. Stay comfortable, go up and down 3-5x the first time. Wait and see how you feel 48 hrs. later before trying it again. The steep bleachers challenge your muscles differently than gradual hills so be gentle with yourself. You do NOT have to do bleachers but they will make your up hill climbing much easier.

Week 4 *If you haven't bought your day pack yet, now is the time!*

3 days/week:

Walk for 60 minutes.

During your walks, do 3 intervals (1 - 3 minutes) of speed/hills/bleachers.

1-2 days/week:

Walk for 30 minutes. Carry your pack with 3-5 pounds.

Walk slow and steady. Remember everything you know about good posture. Be sure your abdominal muscles are gently engaged. Pay close attention to your neck, back, hips, knees and feet for the next 48 hours before walking with weight again.

Week 5 Increase length of speed intervals, add a little more weight.

If you're particularly sore, ease up in one of the variables (don't go so fast during the speed intervals, walk for less total time or rest for 2 days between workouts). But we need to be sure carrying the day pack works just fine.

3 days/week:

Walk for 75 minutes.

During your walks, do 4 intervals (increase to 3 - 5 mins) OR include 2 bleacher sessions (if you were okay with the first one, increase the intensity so you're going up and down 8 - 10x)

1-2 days/week:

Walk 60 minutes. Carry your pack with 5 pounds. Walk slow and steady. Remember everything you know about good posture.

Week 6

3 days/week:

Walk for 90 minutes.

During your walks, do 5 speed intervals (3-5 mins)

2 days/week:

Walk 75 minutes, carry your pack with 10 pounds.

Once you start carrying the pack, it taxes muscles that may not have been used much recently. Go easy on yourself. Some discomfort is due to your muscles getting stronger. That's the good-sore feeling. Other discomfort is joints being inflamed or muscles tightening under strain. That'll feel a little more uncomfortable. If you're feeling the tightening or inflaming version, drop back to less weight in your pack, drop a day so you're back to every other day and don't walk as long. Get a massage, stretch, go easy for 3-4 days, then start again at Week 4 level. Try to keep carrying some weight. If you simply can not carry weight (neck/shoulder injuries), we need to find out now.

When you are carrying a pack, do not work on speed.

Week 7 Increase length of time walking with pack for endurance.

2 days/week (decrease from 3):

Walk 90 minutes with six, 3-5 minute speed intervals.

3 days/week (increase from 2) :

Walk 90 minutes, carry 10 pounds.

If you're ready for a challenge, try some steep hills or a day hike up a mountain.

Week 8

2 days/week:

Walk 2 hours with seven, 3 - 5 minute speed intervals.

3 days/week:

Walk 2 hours, carry 10 pounds.

Week 9 Grab a friend and do a day hike (6 - 10 miles) carrying max 15 pounds.

2 days/week:

Walk 2.5 hours with eight, 3-5 min speed intervals.

3 days/week:

2 days walk 2 hours carrying 10 lbs.

1 day walk 3 hours carrying 10 lbs.

Week 10 Great time to do a day hike with whatever gear you might carry (sweater, rainjacket, snacks, sunglasses etc.) Notice how great it feels to move fast through the woods! Notice the light on the leaves. Enjoy your strength and endurance! Might even feel a bit proud at what you've accomplished.

2 days/week

Walk 2.5 hours with nine, 3-5 min. speed intervals.

3 days/week

3 days walk 2 hours carrying 10 lbs.

1 day walk 3 - 4 hours carrying 10 lbs.