

# walking

Since the start of the recession, almost one in five young people have turned to walking to save money on fitness or travel. **David Foster** finds out why it's a good step to take

**I**t's a no-brainer, really. Walking is the most natural way to get about: it's easy, it keeps you fit, and you don't need any special equipment to do it. But best of all in these recessionary times, walking is absolutely free!

Of course, walking is also one of the slowest forms of transport there is. But it may still be your quickest option, taking into account all the other factors that make up your journey. "People always over-estimate the speed of a car or bus journey, and under-estimate how quickly they can walk," says the Ramblers' head of walking programmes and promotion, Simon Barnett. "Add in the time you spend parking the car or waiting for a bus, and walking is often the best choice for short trips."

And that's the key. No-one seriously suggests that you sell the car and tear up your travelcard; but, on average, about a third of all journeys are less than a mile. Is it really sensible to drive the short trips that you could walk in just a few minutes?



## Fitting it in

Probably not, especially when you think about the other benefits of walking. We all know that exercise is good for us, but most of us don't do enough of it. In England, 60% of adults – and almost half as many children – are already overweight or obese, which increases their risk of health problems such as diabetes, cancer and liver disease.

But can something as simple as walking really make a difference? Yes, says Dr Charlie Foster, a physical activity researcher at Oxford University who is

funded by the British Heart Foundation. "Walking is a great way for people with sedentary lifestyles to get a bit more exercise," he says. "More than one in three women will benefit from walking at 3mph for 30 minutes a day, even if that's split into two or three chunks. Walking a bit more, and walking a bit faster, could cut their risk of heart attack by up to 25%."

The trick is to do it regularly, says Jennifer Smith Maguire of Leicester University, who writes extensively about fitness and society. "Build walking into your daily life and you're much more likely to do it," she says. "Get off the bus a couple of stops early or walk to work – the more you can do that, the less time you'll need to spend at the gym." After all, as Jennifer points out, "when you separate exercise from daily life, it's the first thing you'll drop."

## Make walking part of your daily routine

- Keep some comfortable shoes by the front door at home, and leave the car keys and travelcard upstairs.
- Walk part of your daily commute and keep your smart shoes at work.
- Explore your local area for shortcuts to make your walk as quick as possible.
- A small umbrella will fend off any showers - you don't need any special kit.
- Arrange to go walking with a friend - you'll be much more likely to do it!
- Visit Walk4Life at [www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/partnersC4LWalk4LifeToolkit.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/partnersC4LWalk4LifeToolkit.aspx) for more healthy, money-saving ideas.

# off the pounds



## Walk4Life

That's the thinking behind Walk4Life, part of the government's Change4Life initiative that encourages families to 'eat well, move more, live longer'. The Ramblers has been closely involved from the start, running a pilot family walking project in Barrow and helping to produce a toolkit of tips, games and advice for the Walk4Life website.

"Many Ramblers walk once or twice a week for leisure," says Simon, "but some

health benefits are quite short-lived. For instance, exercise only lowers your blood pressure for about 48 hours, which is why it's so important to be active every day."

And what better way to stay active than by going for a walk? Walking just one mile burns at least 100 calories, and the average parent could save £160 a year by swapping the daily school run for a good, brisk walk with the kids. That's a great recipe for walking off the pounds!



The Ramblers organised family walking project in Barrow, Cumbria

## Economic Emma

Emma lives in south London and commutes to her office near Oxford Circus. Her weekly travelcard costs £36.80, and the journey takes an hour by rail and tube.

She works out three times a week at her local leisure centre, taking about 70 minutes each time. The membership costs £8.20 a week.

To save money, Emma decides to buy a weekly season ticket (£25.90) to Victoria mainline station and walk the 2½km/1½ miles to her office. Although it takes 10 minutes longer than the tube, Emma enjoys her daily walk through Green Park and soon feels fit enough to cancel her gym membership.



### Here's what Emma saves:

	Cost	Time*	CO2*
Rail and tube	£36.80	10h 00m	13.0kg
Working out	£8.20	3h 30m	0.3kg
<b>Weekly total</b>	<b>£45.00</b>	<b>13h 30m</b>	<b>13.3kg</b>
Rail and on foot	£25.90	11h 40m	8.0kg
<b>Weekly savings</b>	<b>£19.10</b>	<b>1h 50m</b>	<b>5.3kg</b>
Percentage saved	42%	14%	40%

(\*Journey times and CO2 figures calculated using the travel planner at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk))