

## Why Walking?

### Best Foot Forward

Walking is the most commonly taken exercise in the UK, with around 8/10 journeys under a mile being made on foot. Brisk walking is the perfect way to help you meet the current activity recommendations.

In health terms it's been described as the perfect exercise and that probably rings true in broader societal terms as well. Its potential impact for health has seen the establishment of the national Walking for Health Initiative.

The scheme supported by the British Heart Foundation and the Countryside Agency, was funded by the New Opportunities Fund and sought to establish a series of walking schemes and walk leader volunteers to encourage more walking for health benefits.

Many other agencies, such as the Pedestrians Association and the Ramblers, are also working to promote more access to walking opportunities for a variety of health, social and environmental reasons.

However, a lot of the initial promotional work has been aimed at walking within parks, green spaces or in rural areas and whilst this creates nice settings and promotes tourism it does not fully address the needs of the urban dweller in achieving the current adult activity recommendations for health benefit.

More importantly those most in need in health terms tend to be those who least access rural activities and tackling health inequalities are now recognised as a priority agenda.

With its local focus Urbanwalks offers an opportunity to support work on health inequalities; a central focus and priority of partnership work across many health and local authorities.

### The Health Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely.
- Reduces the risk of dying prematurely from heart disease.
- Reduces the risk of developing diabetes.
- Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure.
- Helps reduce established high blood pressure.
- Reduces the risk of colon cancer.
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.
- Helps control weight.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling.
- Promotes psychological well-being.

## **Societal Benefits of Walking**

- Walking is the most socially inclusive mode of transport; it's free and requires no special equipment.
- Walking promotes social interaction, which in turn can enhance a sense of community and help reduce social isolation.
- More people walking can help to regenerate urban areas in many ways. Urban regeneration projects such as New Deal, work closely with local communities to ensure that they have a say in the physical and social redevelopment of their local community environment.
- By reclaiming the streets people can become aware of what they need in order to make their environment safer, more accessible, more attractive, more inclusive and to ensure that any change is sustained.
- More people walking can help to reduce crime and the fear of crime, additional support activities such as visible community street wardens also helps.
- Walking is important to local community activities and the economy. Promoting walking to local shops, schools, places of worship and health centres engages the community in everyday activity within their everyday environment and can play its part in reducing car journeys.
- Many existing partnerships and organisations are already promoting walking and other activities designed to improve urban areas and social capital. This offers people a route of progression should they want to become more involved in community activities.