

This Walking Fitness Test will give you a good idea of how fit you are compared with other people and will give you a starting point so you can measure your progress as you do more walking and get fitter and fitter.

This test can be a tremendous motivator. You don't just feel fitter - you can actually measure your improvement.

The Walking Fitness Test is based on a commonly used (and scientifically sound) method to measure your aerobic fitness called the *Rockport 1 Mile Fitness Test*¹.

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How to take the test

These instructions should tell you everything you need to know – we have also produced a video which you can watch on www.walk4life.info

To take the test you need:

- a flat walking route one mile long (1609 metres) – you can find these on www.walk4life.info - search for Walk4Life Miles and look for the ones with the fitness test icon. There may not be one near to yet, but more are being added so keep checking
- a watch with a second hand or a stop watch
- details of your weight and age
- internet access to www.walk4life.info to put in your results and get your score.

What is your pulse?

Your pulse is your heart rate, or the number of times your heart beats in one minute. Pulse rates vary from person to person. Measuring your pulse can help you assess how intensely you are exercising.

¹ Kline et al 1987 Estimation of VO₂max from a one-mile track walk, gender, age and body weight. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*. Volume 19, Number 3, Pages 253-259 The American College of Sports Medicine.



Practise taking your pulse before you do the Walking Fitness Test so that you're confident and ready to take your pulse immediately you finish the mile. It's important to do it immediately because as soon as you stop exercising your heart rate will begin to slow down to its normal rate quite quickly.

You may find it tricky to feel your pulse before the walk but it should be easier once you've exercised a little.

How to take your pulse

1. Place the tips of your index, second, and third fingers on the palm side of your other wrist, below the base of the thumb. Or, place the tips of your index and second fingers on your lower neck, on either side of your windpipe. (See the illustrations)
2. Press lightly with your fingers until you feel the blood pulsing beneath your fingers. You might need to move your fingers around slightly up or down until you feel the pulse.
3. Use a watch with a second hand, or look at a clock with a second hand or a stopwatch.
4. Count how many beats there are in 10 seconds and multiply by six to get your pulse rate (heart beats per minute).



How to take the fitness test

1. Walk the mile as fast as you comfortably can but without over-exerting.
2. At the end of the mile:
 - record how long it took you to walk the mile (in minutes and seconds)
 - take your pulse over 10 seconds (it will be anywhere between 10 and 25 beats) and make a note of it.
3. You'll need to put these figures in to the website to get your fitness score. Don't forget to multiply your 10 second pulse by 6 to get your result in beats per minute.
4. If you haven't got access to the internet use the paper record sheet and write your time and pulse down – you can then put them into the the website later, or ask someone to help you do it.
5. Go to www.walk4life.info and sign in. You need to sign up to the site to use the fitness calculator. It's free, and you don't have to give us any personal details apart from those needed to do the test.
6. When you are signed up to the site go to 'Record my progress' and identify the walk you have used for the fitness test. There is advice on how to find your way around the site, and how to use it in "How to track your progress" and in "How to Walk4Life". Put your pulse rate that you recorded into the walking fitness test calculator and select 'complete'.
7. You might want to take the test again in a few weeks to see what progress you are making. You can use any of the walking fitness test routes on the website for the test, it doesn't have to be the same route. They are all 1 mile long.



Walking Fitness Test Scores

Your score will place you in one of six categories from 'very poor fitness for your age' to 'superior fitness for your age':

- **Very high:** you are among the top 10% within your age group
- **High:** you are among the top 20% within your age group
- **Above average:** you are among the top 50% within your age group
- **Below average:** you are among the lower 50% within your age group
- **Low:** you are among the lower 20% within your age group
- **Very low:** you are among the bottom 10% within your age group

To improve your score, simply take more exercise. Walking is an ideal way to improve your fitness. Aim to walk a little further and faster each time and you will soon see your aerobic capacity/fitness level improve. Repeat the test once or twice in the first couple of weeks to ensure that you are getting a consistent score. Taking your pulse accurately may take a little practice. After that repeat the test every few months.

What is aerobic fitness?

Aerobic fitness is a measure of your body's ability to:

- extract oxygen from the air you breathe into your lungs
- deliver oxygen to the muscles via the heart and blood vessels and
- use oxygen to metabolise carbohydrate and fat within muscles providing the energy for you to move.

Aerobic fitness is especially important for endurance activities (e.g. running, walking, swimming and cycling) but it is also important in preventing and coping with disease.

Doctors tell us that fitter people tend to have a lower risk of diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer. They also say that people with higher levels of aerobic fitness tend to maintain more mobility and independence in the event of disease, suffer fewer complications and are less likely to need to be in hospital.

A limitation of the test: it's not so suitable for under 14s or over 70s

If you're under 14, you can still record the time it takes you to walk the mile and try to beat it after a bit of practice. If you're over 70, the test may not be inaccurate; it's just that there are no existing data against which we can accurately compare your score. As more and more people over 70 take part in this initiative we'll be able to show you (in a few months' time, we hope) how you compare to other people of your age.

The test is not accurate if you are pregnant as your heart beat may be higher than normal.

Concerned about your health?

Walking is one of the safest forms of exercise, however if you have any concerns about your health, then before taking the Walking Fitness Test, we suggest you fill in the short questionnaire below to check that the test is suitable for you.

	Yes	No
Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition and that you should only do physical activity recommended by a doctor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel pain in your chest when you do physical activity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you lose your balance because of dizziness or do you ever lose consciousness?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a bone or joint problem such as arthritis that could be made worse by exercising?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a doctor ever said your blood pressure was too high?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a good physical reason, not mentioned here, why you should not follow an activity program even if you wanted to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you answer yes to any of the questions above? If you did then you may wish to speak to your doctor before taking the walking fitness test.