



What is informal group walking?

“Walking with other people
can be a great way to catch up



Walking is natural, we've always done it! And walking with other people can be a great way to catch up, build friendships or just have fun. Meeting up with others to walk doesn't always need to be formally arranged, sometimes it can just happen if the mood takes you or the time is right.

This impromptu walking usually takes someone to announce they will be going for a walk and inviting others to join them. That walking 'champion' could be you.

**THAT WALKING
CHAMPION
COULD BE YOU**

Q. What is an informal group walk?

A. It is a purposeful walk, shared by more than one person that takes place with little advance organisation or promotion.

An informal walk could be;

- a spur of the moment idea that has little prior arrangement, maybe with family, friends, work colleagues or a community group.
- just two like-minded people or a small group of people who enjoy the benefits of walking.
- short, usually 20 – 60 min.
- announced in any way to suit your walking friends, word of mouth, text, email, social media
- by invitation direct to your regular walking buddies or by motivating people you know that will enjoy and benefit from the activity. All should agree...
"That's a great idea"

An example of an informal walk... When taking a break from the workplace... *"I'm off out for a walk at lunchtime, anyone fancy joining me?"*

An informal walk wouldn't be:

- promoted widely or scheduled weeks or months in advance.

Q. Is a risk assessment required?

A. No

Anybody going for an informal walk would be in agreement that it's a good idea and everyone would be responsible for themselves. Have you ever called on a friend to walk to a café for a drink or to go to town shopping? Did you do a risk assessment? An informal walk really is no different. Those you invite may ask questions to understand more about what they're agreeing to. For example; *how long will we be out for? Is it muddy down that path and I'm only wearing my work shoes?* We all naturally assess any risks and make decisions, and a group of people will instinctively watch out for each other.... *"Let's go this way, there's less traffic"*

There is no need for have a formal risk assessment for an informal walk. It may, however, be useful that someone is familiar with the area and already have an idea of where to walk and knowledge of the paths on the way.

Q. Can my employer request a risk assessment?

A. Conducting a risk assessment is discretionary.

If you have, or are seeking permission from an employer to include a walking break or walking meeting in your normal working time, you maybe asked to complete a risk assessment and/or a disclaimer. When your walk falls in work time your employer is responsible for your health and safety. Your employer should be able to provide help with this if it is requested.

Q: Do I need personal liability insurance? Does my organisation need public liability Insurance?

A: No.

An informal walk is not an organised led walk. You wouldn't get public liability insurance to go for a walk with your family. Think of an informal walk in the same way.

Q: Are registers, health questionnaires or disclaimers required?

A: No. An informal walk is not an organised led walk.

If your workplace/ community group are interested in setting up a more formal led walk and would like more information and help, contact the local co-ordinator for Walking For Health.

Q: What do I need to consider when suggesting an informal group walk?

A: Informal walking requires a common sense approach. Each informal walk will be different and can be adapted to your circumstances. Some considerations include:

It is useful for someone to have some knowledge of the local area so that an outline route can be suggested

There is no formal walk 'leader'. Informal walks are enabled by 'walking champions' who encourage people to take informal walks e.g. *"Let's meet at the entrance at 1pm and go for a 20 minute walk"*

Q: What does it mean to be an Informal Walking Champion?

A: An Informal Walking Champion is someone who initiates and encourages people to take part in informal walks.

As an Informal Walking Champion you may wish to:

- Mention before setting off, or in an informal conversation, that all walks are undertaken at our own risk.
- Let walkers know approximately how long the walk will be and what time it is expected to finish.
- Let people know that leaving the walk or turning back is fine, just let someone on the walk know to avoid concern.
- Mention any potential hazards you might encounter and allow others to share any information... *“Take care on the canal today folks it’s been raining and it’s a bit slippery underfoot”*

As an Informal Walking Champion it may also be useful to think about:

- If someone new to walking has concerns for their health, suggest they take easy to begin with. Come along and see how it feels or talk to a health professional first. Re-iterate that they may head back before the rest of the group if they wish.
- Making an effort to walk and talk with people who have not joined in before. It’s a sociable activity and any expectations or concerns can be shared.

- Your walk might take place with agreement from an employer, maybe as part of a Workforce Health project. You may be asked to take a list of names so they know who is taking part.
- Sharing positive stories ... *“I’m a lot more focused at work in the afternoon, I have more energy and I’m not craving snacks!”*
- Sending a reminder to walkers. Perhaps an email, text, Messenger or WhatsApp..
- Keeping an eye on the GM weather!! The Met Office have a great App for your phone or device.
- Sharing good routes or maps. Consider sharing apps you find useful such as Fitbit, Garmin or Strava
- Setting walking challenges and encourage walkers to achieve their goals

The most important thing is....enjoy walking!

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