

10 Things to do Before a Walking Event

©1995 Dave McGovern-Dave's World Class

Many walkers revel in the solitude they experience during their daily workouts. Maxine Lebowitz is definitely NOT one of these walkers. The gregarious Lebowitz would rather share her stress-relieving walks with others than go it alone.

Maxine met her husband, Steve, on a group walk that she organized for her singles club--although she admits she boosted her chances of meeting "Mr. Right" by inviting only men--and to celebrate her 50th birthday she pinned competitors numbers on 50 of her closest friends and walked 3 1/2 miles to her favorite restaurant. It should come as no surprise, then, that Maxine likes to spice up her training now and then by walking in an organized event with a few thousand perfect strangers.

"Walking in a charity walk, or in a running race is a great way to meet other healthy, like-minded walkers," says Lebowitz. Surrounded by hundreds, even thousands of other health and fitness walkers in a fun, festive atmosphere, you'll lose track of time as the miles slip away--there's something about the camaraderie of shared struggle that just can't be duplicated during a solo effort.

If you're used to walking alone, deciding to enter an organized event may be the hardest part--preparation for the event itself is a snap. Having a specific event to look forward to gives your daily walks a concrete purpose and makes them more fun. But once you've put the training miles in, then what? How do you prepare in the final days before the event, and what do you need to keep in mind immediately before, and during your walk?

Jeff Salvage, coach of the Eastern Pennsylvania Leukemia Society Team in Training encourages his walkers to cut back on their mileage while maintaining the same pace, and to stretch after each workout.

Putting some thought into logistics will help ease any event morning jitters. Decide what time you'll leave the house, who'll be driving, where you'll park, and so on. If possible, do a "trial walk" on the course: Pack everything you'll take on the event day, and head out early enough to get you to the site at your required time. Once there, warm up and stretch as usual, then walk the course noting any hills, rough pavement and anything else that might affect your walk.

Here are some other suggestions from Jeff, Maxine, and other experienced walkers:

- Take it easy the day before.

Do a very light workout, then stretch to prevent sluggishness.

- Don't alter your routine.

Eat what you normally eat, don't try new stretches, and don't wear a brand new pair of shoes.

- Pick up your registration packet early.

There may be special circumstances for walkers; a separate start, or special race numbers to differentiate walkers from runners.

- Pack a small fanny pack with "emergency supplies."

During the walk you may need a bit of Vaseline to prevent chafing, Band-Aids in case of blisters, extra toilet

paper "just in case," etc.

- Pin on your number and lay out your clothes the night before.

Just like mom used to do for you!

- Get to bed at a reasonable hour.

But not too much earlier than usual or you may have trouble sleeping.

- Eat lightly.

Have a light, carbohydrate-rich meal 2 - 4 hours before the event. A bagel, a PowerBar or a piece of fruit with plenty of fluids are good choices.

- Don't overdress.

As soon as you begin walking you'll wish you weren't wearing those heavy sweat pants!

- Arrive at least one hour before the event.

Give yourself time to register, use the bathroom, warm up and check your gear before the start.

- Drink plenty of fluids.

Hydrate fully before you start, and then drink about 8 ounces every 15 minutes during the walk. If available, carbohydrate drinks can give you a much-needed energy boost.

- Start your own stopwatch.

It may take you several minutes to get to the starting line after the gun goes off in some larger races. The official clock won't reflect this so time yourself.

- Be a Tortoise, not a Hare.

Walk a bit slower in the early miles to keep from "hitting the wall" in the later stages of the race.

- Don't stop immediately.

Walk very slowly for a few minutes to "cool down" after the event, then drink some water, and gently stretch your major muscle groups to ward off muscles soreness.

- Stick around for the post-race raffle.

Somebody has to win that free trip to Hawaii!

How Do You Find the Perfect First-Time Walking Event?

Okay, you've decided entering an organized event is the perfect way to rev up your walking training. Now where do you go to find that perfect first-time event?

If you've never walked in an event before, look into Race for the Cure. This national organization hosts 65 different five kilometer running and walking events in 35 states to benefit breast cancer research. Some cities

hold separate walking events, others mix runners and walkers. Contact the National Office at 1-800-288-SHOE for a race near you.

The American Volkspport Association is another good source of first-timers. The Association hosts low-key family-oriented group walks throughout the country for non-competitive walkers. The walks are measured-distance walks, but go at your own pace--times are not recorded. To locate your local chapter, contact the National Office at: (800) 830-WALK

Feeling Ambitious? How About a Marathon?

To really test their fitness, many walkers who've been entering shorter events for a while eventually decide to move up to the marathon (26.2 mile) distance. Here are a few great options for first-time marathon walkers:

The Leukemia Society is a walker-friendly charity that sponsors marathon "Teams in Training" in many U.S cities. By collecting pledges, T & T Walkers earn free trips to walk in marathons in exciting places like Bermuda, Honolulu and Anchorage, Alaska. Contact the Leukemia Society at 1-800-482-CURE for a chapter near you.

You can also contact your local running club directly for event information. Many clubs sponsor marathons--and shorter races!--that are open to fitness walkers.

Chuck George, race director of the Mardi Gras Marathon, has welcomed walkers in the Marathon and all New Orleans Track Club races for the past ten years. To find about more about next January's 26.2 mile jaunt through the Big Easy's historic neighborhoods, contact George at (504) 469-9268.

Other walker-friendly Marathons include:

- Portland

This great first-time event features a separate start for walkers; and belly dancers, Scottish bag-pipers and high school bands providing entertainment along the course. Contact Laura Eyer at (503) 226-1111 to sign up for this fall classic.

- Catalina Island

One of the ten most scenic marathons in the country, whose field includes nearly 20% walkers. (714) 737-1495.

- Maui

Another scenic, walker friendly marathon passes passes Mt. Haleakakla and the rugged West Maui Mountains, and hugs ocean cliffs where humpback whales are often seen playing in the clear blue waters below. Call Bob Kramer at (808) 871-6141 for a great excuse to visit Hawaii in March!

- Los Angeles

Also in Early March. Share the relatively flat course with many of the world's best runners and more than 2 million spectators. (310) 444-5544.

Many other fun, scenic marathons like Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul), Big Sur and Disney accept and encourage walkers, but officially close the course after 6-6 1/2 hours. You'll still get an official time, t-shirt and finishers medal, but roads may re-open to traffic. Be sure to ask race organizers about particular policies

before entering any running race.

Whether you opt for a marathon, a volksmarch or a charity walk, entering an organized walk may be just the thing to energize your walking program.

[*Return to homepage](#)
