Guidelines for the annual Steps to Health challenge

Five-week challenge
The Steps to Health challenge runs for five consecutive weeks.

Set up a team
Set up a team with your work colleagues of between two and 30.

Work with your team co-ordinator
Your team co-ordinator will register your team with our national project team. Your team co-ordinator will then receive a step counter and a challenge information card for each person taking part.

You can use your own step counter
If you prefer, you can use your own step counter, a smartphone app or wearable device, like a FitBit, to record your daily step count.

Wear your step counter all the time
Wear your step counter throughout the day – before, during and after work. If you change your clothes during the day, don’t forget to transfer your step counter!

Complete the physical activity questionnaire before starting
If you are new to walking or returning after illness or injury fill in the physical activity questionnaire, known as PAR-Q. This is on our website hse.ie/stepschallenge/ You don’t need to share this with anyone. It will allow you to assess if you need to see your GP or work Occupational Health staff first.

Keep track of your steps
Record your daily step count into this Challenge Card at the end of each day, for example:

- Monday 5,413 steps
- Tuesday 6,962 steps
- Wednesday 7,103 steps

Keep this Challenge Card for the five-week programme and return it to the team co-ordinator at the end. Your team co-ordinator will record the total number of steps for the team (not yourself) at the beginning and end of the Steps to Health challenge.

This will let us see how much progress has been made nationally.

Spread the word – tell colleagues how good walking makes you feel.

Any extra steps you take every day will be good for your health.

More information is available on our website hse.ie/stepschallenge
or email steps@hse.ie

@hsesteps #HSEstepschallenge

A guide for staff participating in the

Steps to Health challenge

Record your steps below:

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What is the Steps to Health challenge?

The Steps to Health challenge encourages you to walk and count your steps during a five-week period. You can accumulate the steps during the day by:

- taking the stairs instead of the lift
- parking your car as far as possible away from your workplace
- walking during your breaks
- walking when at home with your family and friends

Aim to walk 10,000 steps daily, which is equal to eight kilometres or five miles. If you are new to walking, start off with 10 minutes at a time. Build it up every day at your own pace to reach as many steps as you can.

Form a team of between two and 30 people. Each team nominates a team co-ordinator who links in with our national Steps to Health challenge project team during our annual challenge.

Research tells us that we are more motivated and likely to take part in physical activity like the Steps to Health challenge when we do it with friends and colleagues. It is also a lot more fun and engaging when we get out and about with colleagues, friends and family.

You can use this guide for other challenges

This guide is written for staff taking part in our annual Steps to Health challenge. But you can also use it to do an individual steps challenge or to run a work team steps challenge at other times during the year.

How do I reach 10,000 steps daily?

Before you start the Steps to Health challenge, measure your daily steps. Use your:

- step counter
- fitbit
- smart watch or
- one of the many free apps you can download to your phone

You will find out how many steps you do daily without trying to be more active. This is your starting point for the number of steps to build on during the challenge.

Start from your comfortable number of daily steps and build up gradually to 10,000 by adding on 300 to 500 each day. If you are not active at present (3,000 steps or less), it could take you at least three weeks to reach the 10,000 steps daily.

If you are already fairly active (7,000 steps per day or more), it should take you about a week to reach the 10,000 steps daily.

How do I use the step counter?

The step counter has a built-in pendulum which counts your steps as you walk. Put the step counter on your waistband between your navel and your hip. It should be parallel to the ground and not tilted to the side. Make sure it is set at 0 each day. Your co-ordinator can help you if you have any questions about using or wearing it.

Can I improve my health by doing 10,000 steps daily?

Experts from across the world agree that by doing 10,000 steps daily you will improve your health and wellbeing. Research studies have found that by stepping out you can:

- have a stronger heart – decreasing your risk of heart disease like heart attacks and strokes by 50%
- have more stable blood sugar levels – reducing your risk of type 2 diabetes
- protect against some cancers, particularly colon and breast cancer
- have a healthier brain – increase your ability to do new tasks and protect your memory
- be happier, more energetic and sleep better

Tips to help you reach the 10,000 steps

- Park away from your destination
- Park your car as far as possible from your destination – work, the school gate or shopping centre
- Walk a few bus stops
- If you use the bus, get off one or two stops before your destination.
- Add in extra steps
- Take the stairs instead of the lift; each flight is worth about 40 steps.
- At work, use the photocopier, kitchen or bathroom that is furthest away.
- Walk over and chat to a colleague rather than sending them an email.
- Walk while discussing work with a colleague or during a teleconference call if it is appropriate in your work environment.
- Walk more when shopping
- If you are out shopping in a town, park in a central location and go from shop to shop and back to your car as necessary.
- In the supermarket, do an extra lap around an aisle before you go to the checkout.
- Be prepared for a stroll
- Keep a pair of runners in your car and you will have them handy whenever you have time spare, even if it’s a five-minute stroll while waiting to pick someone up.