

What Do I Wear?

I've heard some folks say, "It doesn't matter what you wear to walk. Just get out there." Let's face it. If your clothes are bothering you while you walk, it's another excuse you can use to not do it. And we don't want chafing, too much skin showing, too hot, too tight, or something riding up to stop you from getting and staying healthy! So today, here are a few tips to get you started.

First, hikers have been saying for years, "Cotton kills." *What?!?* But, if you're my age and older, you remember the days when folks would say to put on a nice, cool cotton shirt or dress in the summer time. Remember seersucker? And now, "*cotton kills*"? They say that, because cotton holds moisture. Have you ever hung blue jeans to dry? Takes forever, right? If you're hot and sweaty, that cotton shirt will hold the sweat instead of drying quickly like a man-made fiber like polyester or nylon. Think about it. What's your swimming suit made of? Not cotton. If your clothes are wet, they aren't moving the moisture away from your skin as you sweat. If it's not moving away, you're not cooling. If you're not cooling, it could lead to heat stroke. Make more sense now? Cotton is not good in the winter time, either, but we'll talk about that closer to the colder months.

(Now ladies, have you ever read articles or been told by a doctor to wear cotton skivvies? I truly don't understand that one, except that maybe the advice just hasn't caught up with today's technology. Are the inside of running shorts cotton? Nope. Are specially made athletic skivvies cotton? Nope.)

Socks. Avoid cotton socks! They trap moisture and can cause blisters. Don't believe me? Ask someone who used to run in the 1970s about blisters. I stick to one brand once I found them. That seems to be common - people find a brand that works for them, and they stick with it. I like the no-show socks that come right to the top of my shoe if I'm walking on asphalt. If I'm walking on gravel roads or unpaved trails, I like the kind of socks that go up about an inch on the ankle. That seems to help me keep little pebbles out of my socks and shoes. I like a medium weight, but that's just my preference. When I'm doing long distances, I usually wear a lighter sock, because I wrap my feet (gee, I think that's a topic for another day).



Shirts. In the summer, I like v-necks if I'm wearing a t-shirt. I get hot, so I don't want anything up around my neck rubbing. For a long time, I didn't like wearing sleeveless shirts, because I had more chafing without sleeves. That's not a problem, so in these 90 degree days, give me a tank-top! (We will

cover tips for winter layers when the weather is cooler. I can't stand the thought of layers at the moment!) If you need extra pockets, consider wearing a cycling jersey. They usually have 2 or 3 pockets on the back that are great for carrying keys and little items.

Bras. Ladies, sports-bras are more comfortable even though you're "just" walking. You won't get as much chafing, poking or prodding. Lace on sweat? No, thanks. Really hot days? - Take that padding out of those sports bras. All you need while walking is a hot flash on a 90 degree day in 80 percent humidity to agree with me on that one!



One of my friends mentioned one day as we were walking up a steep hill that she was having problems catching her breath. She discovered her medieval torture device/sports bra was too constricting, and she couldn't breathe deeply. Okay, no matter how large you are, don't get one *that* tight.

Shorts/Pants. If you're comfortable in running shorts, go for it. Most of them have the liners, so they are much cooler without that extra layer. One of my friends said though, "I'm not 20, and I don't want to look like I'm trying to be 20." Okay, so what do you wear if you're a little older or overweight or prefer more coverage? Again, since you are trying to avoid cotton, try hiking shorts or pants. Not those canvas shorts, guys. Look for nylon hiking shorts. They usually fall mid-thigh or top of the knee. They also have them in capris or long pants. (Hint: the long pants are great for cooler seasons, too. Just add a layer underneath when the snow starts to fly.) I've also found really light weight yoga pants that are made from a nylon material. They hang loose and dry quickly!

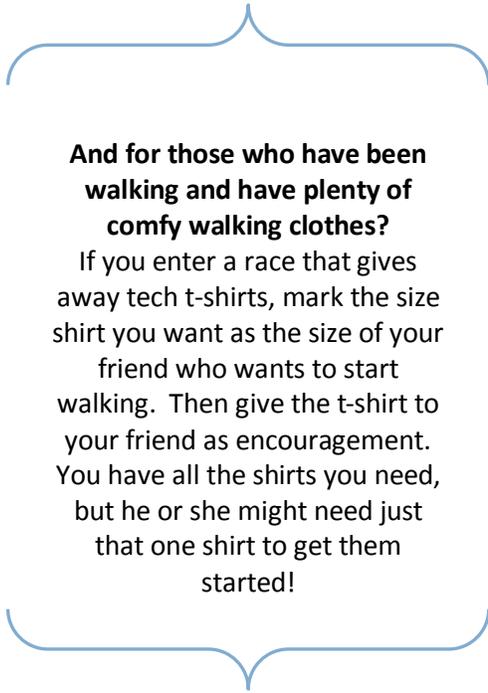


You don't need a whole new wardrobe to get started. I know runners who wear the same shorts and shirt for a week at a time on their runs before washing them. You aren't out there to impress folks with your clothing style, so get one or two outfits to alternate. Make sure what you buy feels comfortable before buying more. I've seen shirts for around \$5, but I don't want to waste \$5 on a shirt that isn't comfortable. If you have a birthday approaching, ask for walking clothes!

It seems like there are exceptions to every rule of thumb. Here is one. My mom is allergic to polyester, so most of the tips I've given today, she can't use. I'm sure there are others out there in the same situation. If you are sensitive to fabrics and chemicals, maybe try a more natural fabric like wool.

She hasn't tried that in the summer, so I can't share any of her tips. Some of my socks have wool in them, and they are comfortable in the summer though. My mom sticks to cotton (and is very careful of the dyes), so she has to watch how hot or sweaty she gets. In the really hot, humid Ohio summer days, she sticks to using the treadmill. In the cool basement. With a fan blowing directly on her. You do what you have to do!

Yes, what you wear can make you more comfortable when you are walking. Even if you're at the beginning of your journey and making laps in your living room to build up your strength, if you're working up a sweat, get a shirt that will make you more comfortable. It can make a difference. Don't let your shirt stop you from your goal of getting healthy!



And for those who have been walking and have plenty of comfy walking clothes?

If you enter a race that gives away tech t-shirts, mark the size shirt you want as the size of your friend who wants to start walking. Then give the t-shirt to your friend as encouragement. You have all the shirts you need, but he or she might need just that one shirt to get them started!