
Walking for Health recommended walk grading

Why grade your walks?

To help underpin the principles of the new Walking for Health health walk definition and our accreditation criteria and provide more clarity and consistency for schemes, we've developed a recommended grading system for health walks. Having a grading system for your walks ensures that new walkers can easily find the right walk for them and it allows you to provide walks that progressively support your walkers to increase their activity before they potentially move on to other physical activity.

We realise that many schemes already have a system that works for them, in which case you may not want to change it. However, for schemes that don't currently grade their walks, we've compiled the following guidance to help you. This has been developed following consultation with our Scheme Coordinator Advisory Panel and is based upon what many schemes are already using.

Levels or grades of walk

The level or grade of each of your walks is really important information for anyone interested in signposting people to, or joining your walks. This brief information should help walkers choose a suitable walk for them and know what to expect when they arrive for the walks. This information should include the length, time and the terrain of the walk. Ideally a 'grade 1' or entry level walk should also be wheelchair friendly and have toilets and refreshments. Preferably all walks should have as few stiles and other obstructions as possible. It is also helpful to include a reminder that walkers walk at their own pace. You can see an example key of levels/grades of walks below.

If there are two or more different levels of walk available within one walk, make sure you promote all these in your programme because people may be put off if you only promote the longer or shorter walks. If you have a wide variety of different routes for a walk, ideally these should all meet the grading criteria you put in the programme and be the same level. It may be that this is not possible for all your routes and this will need to be taken into consideration and explained at the start of the walk.

Walking for Health walks, 'special interest' and 'progression' walks

Regular Walking for Health walks, one-off 'special interest' walks and 'progression' walks can all sit alongside each other in your walk programme so that all your scheme's walking opportunities are in one place and there is a clear progression route for walkers as they get fitter or want to try new things.

As well as providing this information, you may wish signpost fitter walkers on to other walks or activities to help encourage them to continue their progression outside of your scheme. Or if you are running regular walks but you sometimes make them themed 'special interest' walks, or you have separate one-off themed 'special interest' walks, make sure it's clear that the usual Walking for Health walk format will be different.

Example key of levels/grades of walks

Regardless of the grade of walk walkers choose, they should be encouraged to walk at a pace which is comfortable for them. To help them get the most benefit from their walk, you should recommend that they aim to feel a little warmer, breathe a little harder and increase their heart rate but they should still be able to talk.



Walking for Health grade 1 walk – suitable for people who have not walked much before, are looking to be more active, or are returning from injury or illness. They are up to 30 minutes on flat ground or gentle slopes with mainly firm surfaces and no steps or stiles.



Walking for Health grade 2 walk – suitable for people who are looking to increase their activity levels. They are between 30 - 60 minutes and may include some moderate slopes, steps, uneven surfaces and possibly stiles.



Walking for Health grade 3 walk – for people looking for more challenging walks and increasing their level of physical activity. They are generally 45 – 90 minutes and may include steeper slopes, steps, uneven surfaces and stiles.



Your scheme's progression walks – for people who have undertaken Walking for Health grade 3 walks and are now looking to take their next steps. These walks are more than 90 minutes in duration and are likely to include slopes, steps, stiles and uneven surfaces. Or they

may be something a bit different, such as Nordic walks.



Special interest walks – these walks are health walks with a twist. There are up to 90 minutes and may include slopes, steps, stiles and uneven surfaces. They usually include stops along the route to find out more about points of interest.

For people who have undertaken Walking for Health walks and are ready to take their next steps, for example longer walks or Nordic walks, we recommend you encourage them to try your progression walks and activities or signpost them to other walks or physical activity opportunities outside of your scheme.

Other information about your walks

As well as being clear about the levels/grades of walk, you'll also want to let people know about other important features of your walks:

Accessibility by public transport: we'd all like as many Walking for Health walks as possible to be easily accessible to local communities and target audiences. Identifying whether walks are near public transport links in walk programmes helps encourage active and sustainable travel to walks.

Refreshments: the social aspects of the walks are often what motivates people most to join and keep coming back so it's important that schemes promote this as part of their walks.

Easy-access: help make sure everyone feels welcome to join the walks and can easily choose a walk that meets their needs by identifying which walks are accessible for wheelchairs/mobility scooters and pushchairs and whether there is seating on route.

Facilities: it's useful to know if there are toilets at the start/finish and whether there is car parking (and if there is a charge).

Terrain: a general description of the walk route terrain should include things such as slopes, steps, uneven or slippery surfaces and any stiles or other obstructions.

Promoting walk information

To make your grading and walk information visual and easy to understand for everyone, we recommend using icons along with a clear key in your walk programme. We've created a number of stock icons using our branding that you can use to demonstrate walk levels/grades. These are available on our [website](#). We're also creating some customisable template programmes to demonstrate how you can promote all your walks clearly alongside each other and provide other information about your walks. The templates and further range of icons will be available on our website from April.