

01 / A PLACE TO BEGIN

A Walk in the Right Direction

What the science says, and how to make walking work in a demanding life.

You know walking is good for you. The difficult bit is making it happen alongside the job you actually have.

Leading a business. Looking after a team. Carrying responsibility. Your own health can become something you'll get around to when things quieten down.

Except they rarely do.

Walking is a simple place to start. Everyday journeys and short breaks can create opportunities to move, without an elaborate training programme.

I learned to start small

After major heart surgery in January 2025, two nurses helped me out of bed. I took three steps to a chair. Walking became part of rebuilding my capacity, one manageable step at a time.

Your starting point may be different. The question is the same: what can you do now, and how can you make it repeatable?

Capability gets you the role.
Capacity determines how long you can perform in it.

Capacity is how consistently you can draw on your skills and judgement as the demands on you grow.

This guide brings together the evidence, practical ways to move during work and a four-week experiment to help you begin.

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Founder, Virtusium Performance Health

02 / THE BENEFITS AND THEIR LIMITS

Small steps. Meaningful benefits.

Physical health

Regular physical activity helps prevent and manage cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, and supports mental health and sleep. Brisk walking contributes to that activity, although evidence for activity overall cannot establish every benefit of a particular walk. [1]

A review of walking groups found improvements in blood pressure, fitness and physical functioning. Many studies used before-and-after comparisons, which cannot isolate walking from other influences. [8]

Mental wellbeing

A 2024 review of randomised trials found that walking programmes reduced depression and anxiety symptoms compared with inactive controls. Results varied substantially. Walking can support mental health alongside appropriate care. [5]

Breaking up sitting

In a laboratory trial of 19 adults with overweight or obesity, two-minute walking breaks every 20 minutes reduced glucose and insulin responses after a test drink. This demonstrates a short-term metabolic effect, not proof that this schedule prevents diabetes. [6]

Time outdoors

An English survey of almost 20,000 people linked at least 120 minutes a week in nature with better self-reported health and wellbeing. The study cannot establish causation; two hours is not a prescribed minimum or guaranteed dose. [7]

The practical takeaway: regular movement is worth building into your week. Start with what is manageable, without expecting a guaranteed outcome from every walk.

Protecting your health is part of sustaining your capacity to lead.

That is my coaching interpretation. These studies did not directly test executive performance or decision-making.

03 / STEPS, PACE AND TIME

Progress matters more than a perfect number.

A 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis linked around 7,000 daily steps with meaningful health benefits compared with 2,000. Benefits were also seen below 7,000, with further gains for some outcomes at higher counts. [4]

For example, 7,000 versus 2,000 steps was associated with a 47% lower relative risk of death during follow-up. These observational findings cannot prove causation or predict your personal risk reduction. Evidence strength varied, and other differences between participants may explain part of the associations. [4]

Use 7,000 as a reference point.
Start from where you are.

Choose a useful measure

If you enjoy tracking, look at a typical week and choose a manageable increase. If counting adds pressure, use minutes. Steps do not capture cycling, swimming or strength training well.

How much activity?

WHO recommends 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity weekly, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous activity, or a combination. Strengthen the major muscle groups on at least two days a week too. [2]

Two 15-minute brisk walks on each of five days totals 150 minutes. This is one possible pattern, not a starting requirement. Shorter bouts count too. [2]

How brisk?

Use the NHS talk test: you can talk, but singing would be difficult. Build gradually if you are currently inactive. [3]

04 / THE WORKING WEEK

Find a moment you already have.

A plan that depends on a spare hour appearing may struggle to survive a demanding week. Choose one opportunity and make it easy to repeat.

Four places to look

After lunch. Walk before returning to your desk. Choose the route in advance.

Between meetings. Leave a little room in the diary to move along a corridor or outside.

During a conversation. Try a walking call or one-to-one where privacy, accessibility and note-taking allow. Check what works for the other person.

At the end of work. Use a short walk as a transition into home life. Notice how it feels.

Make it easier to begin

Choose a local park, canal path or street you enjoy. Keep an accessible indoor alternative for difficult weather. Comfortable shoes and a familiar route can reduce the preparation needed.

Choose one opportunity.
Make the first step easy to repeat.

05 / YOUR FOUR-WEEK EXPERIMENT

Build something you can keep doing.

This flexible coaching framework is not a clinically validated programme. Adapt it to your health, mobility and starting point. Repeat a week when useful.

Week 1 | Find your anchor

After a cue such as lunch, try five to ten minutes on three days, or less if needed.

Week 2 | Repeat before adding

Keep the cue. Add a day or a few minutes if manageable; otherwise simplify.

Week 3 | Explore your pace

Where appropriate, try a short brisk section. Increase time or pace, one at a time.

Week 4 | Plan for busy weeks

Choose a routine to keep, a smaller version for difficult days and a backup route.

Your commitment for the next seven days

After _____, I will walk for _____ minutes.

My days and route: _____

My smaller version or backup: _____

I will review what worked on: _____

At your review, ask: what happened, what got in the way, and what should I adjust?

Keep it appropriate

Start gently. Choose a safe, accessible route. For a condition, recent surgery or symptoms affecting exercise, follow your clinician or rehabilitation team's advice. Adapted movement can be your starting point.

Stop for chest pain, dizziness or unusual breathlessness. Seek urgent help for severe or persistent symptoms. This guide is general education, not individual medical advice.

When knowing is easier than doing

I help CEOs and senior leaders build habits around sleep, nutrition, movement and recovery that fit their lives and the demands of their roles.

Visit www.virtusiumperformancehealth.co.uk and send me a message about the habit you want to build and what gets in the way. We can explore whether coaching would help.

06 / READ THE EVIDENCE

The science behind the advice.

The numbered links throughout the guide open the sources below. Guidance sets broad activity goals; trials test interventions; observational studies identify associations. Each answers a different question.

1. World Health Organization. Physical activity. Fact sheet (2024).

Background on physical activity, disease prevention, mental health and sleep.

Read source: www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity

2. World Health Organization. Physical activity. European guidance (2021).

Adult activity recommendations, strength work and the value of short bouts.

Read source: www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/physical-activity

3. NHS. Walking for health.

Practical guidance on brisk walking, the talk test and gradual progression.

Read source: www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/walking-for-health/

4. Ding D et al. Daily steps and health outcomes in adults: a systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis. Lancet Public Health (2025); 10: e668-e681.

Device-measured steps and prospective health outcomes. Observational evidence; residual confounding remains possible.

Read source: pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40713949/

5. Xu Z et al. The Effect of Walking on Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. JMIR Public Health and Surveillance (2024); 10: e48355.

Randomised trials of walking; substantial variation across study results.

Read source: publichealth.jmir.org/2024/1/e48355/

6. Dunstan DW et al. Breaking up prolonged sitting reduces postprandial glucose and insulin responses. Diabetes Care (2012); 35: 976-983.

Small crossover trial of walking breaks. Acute metabolic outcomes, not long-term disease prevention.

Read source: pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22374636/

7. White MP et al. Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. Scientific Reports (2019); 9: 7730.

Cross-sectional English survey; does not establish causation or a prescribed nature dose.

Read source: www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3

8. Hanson S, Jones A. Is there evidence that walking groups have health benefits? A systematic review and meta-analysis. British Journal of Sports Medicine (2015); 49: 710-715.

Walking group interventions; includes before-and-after comparisons with limitations for causal conclusions.

Read source: pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25601182/

Evidence checked 12 October 2026. The four-week framework and executive capacity interpretation are Virtusium coaching guidance. This independent guide is not endorsed by the organisations or authors cited.