Imagine that your walks could deliver the results you want. Need to shed some winter weight? No problem. Want to slide into sleek new jeans? You can do it. Looking for a friendly, straightforward way to get back in shape? It's all as easy as A-B-C—the Prevention ABC Walking Plan.

ABC stands for Accelerated, Body Shaping, and Cardio—three types of walking routines blended into one plan. We scoured the best research to find moves that maximize calorie burn. You'll get intervals (to accelerate your results), circuit strength-training (for body shaping), and tempo workouts (to improve your aerobic fitness and heart health). These moves also keep your metabolism revved so you burn more calories after you're done. After just 4 weeks you'll be noticeably trimmer, faster, and stronger.

"Walking is great exercise," says exercise physiologist Len Kranitz, PhD, of the University of New Mexico. “But if you always do the same walking workout, it may not keep you as fit as you’d like. You burn more calories and improve fitness faster when you surprise your body with a variety of workouts that include some higher intensity.” A recent study of more than 15,000 men and women from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle revealed that those who regularly walked fast or jogged were better able to keep off the pounds during middle age (when many of us gain) than those who stuck to the same slow pace.

The ABC plan rolls all these findings into one easy-to-follow program. Each day—except on rest days—you’ll do a specific A, B, or C workout. The basic plan will help you slim down, tone up, and walk faster without fatigue. And you can easily tailor the plan to meet your specific goals. Prevention’s ABC Walking Plan has all the workouts you’ll need to deliver the results that will keep you going for years to come.
Pick your program

With Prevention's new walking plan, meeting any health goal is as easy as, you guessed it, A-B-C. Simply choose from the following plans:

ABC Overall Shape-Up

For the walker who wants to boost performance, shed a few stubborn pounds, and tighten up flabby trouble spots, the best plan is an even blend of A, B, and C workouts. After 2 to 3 weeks, ramp up your A, B, and C workouts evenly by following the advice in "Keep the Results Coming" (after the pullout). Or, once you're happy with your fitness and feeling comfortable, you may want to try another program.

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<td>B: 1 time through circuit (30-40 min)</td>
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<td>A: Brisk 3 intervals (20-30 min)</td>
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*Rotate through the three interval workouts, performing two different types per week.

Beat the Blue-Jean Blues

A good walking workout burns fat and calories, but to really trim those stubborn lower-body trouble spots, you need more muscle-building B workouts. "Because you do these exercises during your walk, your muscles are already warm and ready to work. And you're energized from the sunshine and fresh air, so you may get even better results than you would by going to the gym," says fitness trainer and Walk Reebok Training Team member Leigh Crews.

After 2 to 3 weeks, ramp up your B workouts by following the advice in "Keep the Results Coming" (after the pullout).

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<td>A: Steady* 3 to 5 intervals (20-35 min)</td>
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*Rotate through the three interval workouts, performing a different type each week.
three workouts rolled into one Prevention's ABC Walking Plan combines three essential workouts

Accelerated As the name implies, these workouts include bursts of accelerated speed. "High-intensity exercise will increase your afterburn—the number of calories you continue to use up after you've stopped exercising. It also strengthens your heart so all activity becomes easier," says exercise physiologist Ian Kravitz. The end result: You move more, burn more calories, and melt more fat.

Intervals can be as simple as speeding up between every other telephone pole or so structured that you need a heart rate monitor and a stopwatch. Fitness trainer Leigh Crews prefers something in between. "I like some intervals where you simply walk hard for 1 minute, easy for 2, and so on," she says. "They're easy to follow and very effective." See Intervals for a Workout on the overhead for samples that range from moderate to intense. The goal is to push your body's limits at different speeds. This will help improve your ability to recover and do it again.

To increase your walking speed, bend your knees so your elbows form 90-degree angles and then pump them at a faster pace than your normal walking motion. Take quick strides with your legs keep pace with your arms, and push off your toes at the end of each step. Keep your shoulders down, eyes up, and your abs tight.

Body Shaping These supersculpting moves are designed to challenge fast-twitch muscle fibers that walking doesn't typically engage. Your muscles are made up of slow- and fast-twitch fibers, and regular walking works predominantly slow-twitch. You use fast-twitch fibers while strength training and during explosive movements like sprinting or jumping. "Fast-twitch muscles learn more calories and are the first to get out of shape from inactivity," says Crews. So if you have pencil calves or Solly thighs, these moves will shape them up fast. As a bonus, these exercises build strength and stability in your ankle, knee, and hip joints so you'll be less susceptible to injury.

To get started Walk for 30 to 15 minutes at an easy to moderate pace (5 to 6 on a 1 to 10 scale). Then perform the following 12-minute Body Shaping circuit. At the end of the circuit, walk again for 10 to 15 minutes.

Dip 'n' Curl Shape abs and shoulders Give your core a SUPPER-CHOPPERS strenght training 10 minutes

- Stand on edge of a bench and jump on alternate feet off bench. Inch back off bench and walk 90 degrees until knees are bent 90 degrees. Extend right leg with heel on ground and foot pointed. Bent elbows straight back and head down while pulling right knee toward chest. Don't bend elbows past 90 degrees. Repeat until start. Repeat for 1 minute. Then switch legs. To make it similar, keep both feet on ground while performing open.
Bench Press: Chest, shoulders, biceps, and core for better posture tone and less upper-body fatigue. Stand facing back of park bench or low wall. Place hands wider than shoulder-width apart on bench and walk back until arms are extended and your body is parallel to the floor. Position feet wider than shoulder-width apart. Your body should form a straight line from head to heels. Bend elbows and lower chest toward bench. Then push back up. When arms are almost fully extended, raise left arm straight out in front to complete exercise. Pause for a second, lower left arm, and repeat, this time raising right arm. Repeat for 3 minutes, alternating arms.

Walking Lunges with Knee Lift: Glutes and legs. This stretches legs for a stronger, more efficient stride. Stand with feet hip-width apart. Keeping chest lifted and abs taut, step forward with right foot and bend both knees to lower into lunge position. Keep front knee in line with ankle. Then straighten knees and rise to standing, drawing left leg forward, pause with left knee lifted to hip level. Hold for a count of 3 before bringing left foot all the way forward for next lunge. Continue moving forward, with each step ending in lunge, for 1 in 2 minutes.

Cardio: These walking workouts are the foundation of your program. “This is the solid, aerobic training that burns fat and calories and keeps you fit,” says Crews. “The key is to maintain a pace that lies between somewhat hard and hard—about a 6 on a 1-to-10 scale with 10 as the hardest. You should feel like you can walk a fairly long time—30 or 45 minutes—at this pace.”

The best part: As you continue doing the A and B workouts, your C walks will get faster and burn more calories, but feel easier.
Walk Faster

Keeping pace with your speedy friends is good for more than an ego boost. It also helps you burn more calories per walking bout, shrinks your waistline, and makes your heart and lungs stronger, too. "A lot of walkers get stuck at a 3.7 mph pace—or about 16- to 17-minute miles," says walking expert Mark Fenton, author of The Complete Guide to Walking for Health, Weight Loss, and Fitness. "By doing longer, faster intervals, you can break through that speed limit, hit 4 mph, or 15-minute miles, and reach a new level of fitness." After 2 to 3 weeks, ramp up your A workouts by following the advice in "Keep the Results Coming" (after the pullout). Every 4th week, take a week off from intervals (sub in 30-minute C workouts instead) to give your body a chance to recover and rebuild your muscles.

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Blast Fat

The three steps to weight loss are cardio, cardio, and cardio, says exercise physiologist Len Kravitz. "Every cell has fat-burning furnaces called mitochondria," he explains. "As you increase fitness through continuous aerobic exercise, those mitochondria increase their function dramatically to more effectively burn fat." That means plenty of C workouts. After 3 to 4 weeks, start ramping up your C workouts by following the advice in "Keep the Results Coming" (after the pullout). After 2 months, consider adding time and intensity to your A workouts. Again, use the advice in "Keep the Results Coming."

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Intervals for A Workouts

These A intervals assume that you've been walking regularly for at least a few months. If you're a true beginner, your joints and ligaments need conditioning to handle the intensity, so do intervals only once a week for the first 6 to 8 weeks.

A-Intense Ratio: 1:4

Warm up for 5 to 10 minutes. Then increase your effort (if you're outside, walk faster or jog; if on a treadmill, you can walk faster or increase the incline) for 1 minute so your "work effort" is an 8 or 9+ on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being as hard as you can go. Ease your intensity to a 4 or 5 for 4 minutes of "active rest." Repeat for the number of times specified in each program. Always end this workout with "active rest," or a 5- to 10-minute cool-down.

TIP: "Because you have ample recovery time in this program, really push to keep the intensity high on the work effort," says fitness trainer Leigh Craig. "Be sure to maintain proper walking form.

A-Brisk Ratio: 1:3

Warm up for 5 to 5 minutes. Then increase your speed for 1 minute so your work effort is an 8 to 9 on a 1-to-10 scale. Ease your intensity to a 5 or 6 for 3 minutes of active rest. Repeat for the number of times specified in each program. Cool down for 5 to 10 minutes at the end of the workout.

TIP: You will have less "active recovery" between work efforts in this workout, so each successive interval may feel harder, says Craig. "If need be, lower the intensity of your recovery so you feel completely ready for your next work effort.

A-Steady Ratio: 1:2

Warm up for 5 to 10 minutes. Then increase your intensity for 1 minute so your work effort is a 7 to 8 on a 1-to-10 scale. Ease your intensity to a 5 for 2 minutes of active rest. Repeat for the number of times specified in each program. Cool down for 5 to 10 minutes at the end of the workout.

TIP: This is a great interval for beginners; although you have less rest, you're not pushing the intensity as high. To make this more challenging, you can either increase your effort or extend the work portion to 90 seconds.
Keep the results coming

As you become more comfortable with the program you choose (give yourself at least 2 weeks; you may need as much as a month), you can boost your results even further by ramping up your workouts as described below. Because most of the programs rely primarily on one of the three components—Blast Fat, for example, emphasizes C moves—you’ll first want to increase that part of the workout.

A workouts Every other week, add one more interval to your A workouts until you are completing a total of five. If you are following the Walk Faster plan, you can get even more dramatic speed improvement by increasing the interval work and rest time in the A-Steady intervals. Increase the work portion 1 minute each week for 3 weeks; you should end up walking hard for 4 minutes and recovering for 8 minutes.

B workouts Every other week, perform 1 more minute of one lower-body move and one upper-body move. After 6 weeks, you should be completing the entire circuit twice. Once you feel strong enough, try the more difficult moves for the Dip N’ Curl and the Curb Lift-Off. Start slowly with these moves and stop immediately if you feel any strain.

C workouts Every other week, extend your C workouts by 5 minutes. Your goal is to reach 60 minutes. Don’t have the time? Once you can keep a steady pace for 30 minutes, try doing the distance in less time. Aim to shave 2 to 3 minutes off your time every other week. When you can do the workout in 25 minutes, add more distance to get back up to 30 minutes. Repeat.

Can’t walk outdoors?

You don’t need a $1,000 treadmill to stick with your program when it’s dark or rainy out. Just pop in Walk Yourself Fit, Prevention’s brand-new DVD with an indoor version of the ABC walking workout that you can do right at home. Cost is $14.95. Available at www.preventionvideos.com or by calling (800) 266-9791.

Selene Yeager is a certified personal trainer and Prevention contributing editor.