



Dementia Toolkit – Stay active

Exercise from your doorstep: The wonders of walking



Dementia Toolkit
Living your life with hope



Stay active

Exercise from your doorstep: The wonders of walking

Everyone was encouraged to get out for daily exercise during COVID-19 lockdowns. Many people we talked to during the pandemic talked positively about how walking had helped them, and we were struck by the numerous reasons people liked to go out for a walk.

This booklet offers information about:

- How people with dementia and carers have valued going out for walks especially during lockdown
- How to keep motivated to go out for walks
- How to stay safe on walks

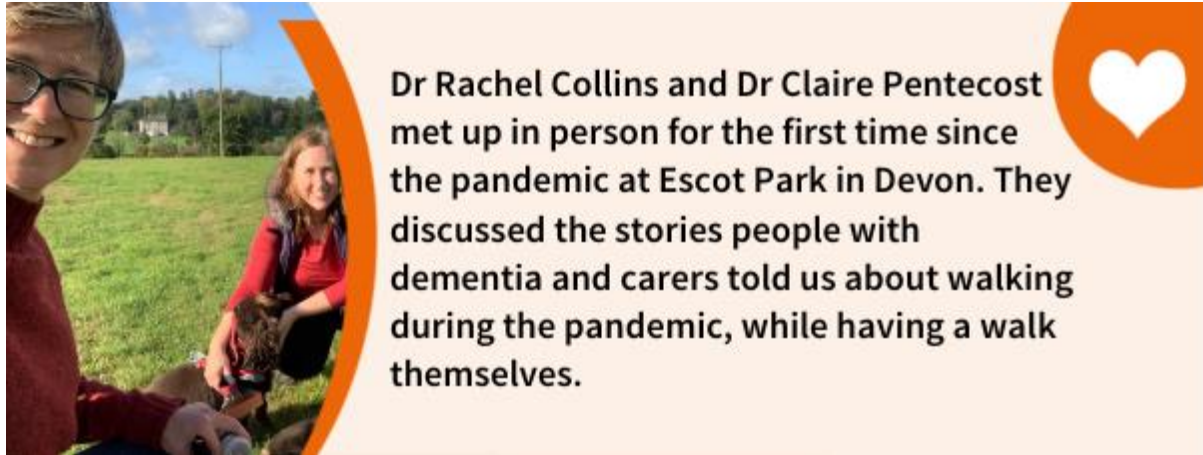


I actually walk the dogs, I've met some very nice people, I just enjoyed it. One of the lovely things is the area: the views that I can look at from the park, looking at the hills and things like that.

A person affected by dementia talking to our researchers



What has our research taught us about walking?



This is a summary of the things people with dementia and carers told us they like about walking:

Walking for ‘exercise’ – A few people increased the distance they walked, or tried to do the distance in a shorter time by walking more briskly. Some people did this as part of a regular routine and a challenge to try to keep their weight down, to stay or get fitter, or to manage diabetes by keeping blood sugar levels on track.

Walking to help keep a routine – people were no longer able to do organised activities and to go out freely because of social restrictions. Because people were otherwise forced to be inside, some people recognised the importance of going for walks as an ‘anchor in your day’. These walks helped people to feel good about themselves. As people had more time, walks as part of chores such as picking up a few groceries became part of a new routine.



The role of having a dog – Having the incentive to get out with the dog was a blessing. Both the dog and the person enjoyed being out, even in bad weather.

Meeting people on walks – many people found themselves bumping into neighbours and friends or fellow walkers when out, whilst keeping social distance, and during COVID-19 people have been quite friendly. Some walked with a friend as part of a regular ‘meet up’ or with their partner for company.

Being out in nature and the local environment – people talked about their increased appreciation for their surroundings, and on walks there is time to take notice. Appreciating being in the fresh air, and noticing the trees and local nature was a source of pleasure and peace.

Learning new things –several people used their walks to learn the names of people they saw, the types of trees or plants they saw, to learn new routes in their local area, or to notice new things about their town. Walking can be a useful form of mental stimulation.



Tips for keeping motivated

- Go out with the expectation to have a nice time, and something simple like just enjoying being outside in fresh air
- Don't go out with too many expectations of yourself – just getting out is a good thing, and you will feel better.
- If you do want to walk for health and fitness, going out regularly is the key! You could go out most days as long as you don't try to go too far too soon. Even a short walk is better than not at all.
- Getting a little bit out of breath is not a problem, and is actually good for you! A few minutes of feeling like this on a walk is fine, but if you are getting so out of breath you could not hold a conversation, just slow down or stop and recover, and then get going again. Over time this will get easier.
- Keep a record of the things you noticed or liked about each walk, and you can reflect back to see the nice things you enjoyed last time.
- If you don't go out it is not the end of the world. Be kind to yourself.

How to stay safe on walks

- If you normally use an inhaler, wear glasses, or a hearing aid, or use a stick – take these with you.
- If you are planning a long walk, or going somewhere that is new to you, let someone know you are heading off, and where you hope to go. Consider taking a mobile phone just in case.
- Don't walk much further than you are used to in one go. Build up as you build your confidence and fitness.
- Plan ahead and check the weather and wear appropriate clothing – don't get caught out!
- If you are unwell you may find that the fresh air actually helps, maybe just don't go out for very long. But if you are too unwell just give it a miss and get good rest.
- If you are planning on starting a new walking routine that you are not used to and you have other health conditions and/or new medication you are worried about just check in with your doctor.



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Contact us

We would love to know what you think of the toolkit. We want to improve it based on your feedback.

Please get in touch with us by emailing
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