

**Appropriate for**



**Athlete**



**Active now**



**Getting started**



**Needs a little help**



**Needs ongoing assistance**

## Outdoor walks of Active Aging Week

A group walk is a popular activity during Active Aging Week. For the past few years, professionals who organized walks have shown how much a walk can fulfill the week's goals of fun and education.

Hosts have geared walks to people who are very diverse: experienced hikers, competent walkers and beginners; people using wheelchairs, canes and walkers; family members from infants to grandparents; people with dementia and disabilities; caregivers and staff members. Politicians, entertainers, high school bands and other local celebrities have joined the event.

Walks originating in retirement communities often include all residents by planning routes around the campus. For organizers in seniors centers or health clubs, destinations may be local parks, recreation areas or public/private spaces, such as malls and botanical gardens.

In most climates, the last week of September remains a desirable time to go outdoors. Outdoor spaces offer variety and accommodate very large groups, as well as smaller ones. Outdoor locations also lend themselves to multiple dimensions of wellness, as participants enjoy plant life and vista views, learn about ecosystems and botany, and meet others.

When planning an outdoor walk, consider these items, advise the hosts of past Active Aging Week walks:

- Plan for transportation, either by providing directions or providing vehicles.
- Check to see if reservations, permits or other paperwork are required by the manager of the property.
- Choose locations where there are restrooms, seating areas and shade.



Walkers learned how to use the exercise stations along the Miles Wellness Path.

- Call ahead to find out if a ranger or docent is available to educate groups.
- Make sure water will be available.

Over the years, hosts of Active Aging Week events have reinforced that organizers do not need to do all the planning themselves. Calling in volunteers and collaborating with like-minded groups can enhance the experience, as well as balance the workload.

Following are a few walks held during Active Aging Week in 2008 that show how working with others contributed to a successful outdoor event.

### Exploring the Miles Campus Wellness Path

Damariscotta, Maine

**Features:** During this guided walk, participants learned how to take advantage of the exercise stations along a trail that is open to the public but not well known, with instruction provided by a physical therapy assistant.

**Organizations:** Spectrum Generations Coastal Community Center and Lincoln County Healthcare

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## Themes

15-Minute Walk With Your Pet

Downtown Historic Walk

Miles for Memory Walk

Nordic Walking introduction

Pet and Person Stroll

Prayer Walk

Scavenger Hunt/Nature Walk

Walk Across North Carolina

Walk Around the World

Walk for Life

Walk to Find the Loch Ness Monster

Wellness Walk

Active Aging Week 2007, 2008

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May-June 2009

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**Marketing:** The walk was included in media releases describing multiple Active Aging Week events as well as in a separate release with greater detail on the walk. Media releases were sent to print, broadcast (radio, cable and television) and web-based media. Fliers were posted in public places throughout the community and county; emails were sent to people on Spectrum Generations' list. Active Aging Week events also were promoted on the local public-access television station and through the Chamber of Commerce.

**Participation:** 10 people of all levels of physical ability

**Event:** Older adults were introduced to the Wellness Path that surrounds the large Miles Campus. The trail wraps around a hospital, doctors' offices, two retirement community buildings, a skilled nursing center and parking structures. The path features views of the Damariscotta River, which borders the property. There are 10 exercise/stretching stations strategically placed along the path that include spaces and bars for exercises such as abdominal crunches, pull-ups and stretches.

Organized by Marianne Pinkham, center coordinator at Spectrum Generations Coastal Community Center, the walk was led by Nancy Basham, a physical therapy assistant on the Wellness/Rehab team at Miles Memorial Hospital. Participants reserved their spaces and signed waiver forms through the community center.

Active Aging Week occurred at the same time that Miles Campus was rededicating the walking path, so when Pinkham contacted the wellness and rehabilitation department, it was a good fit for both organizations.

During the walk, participants stopped at each station, where Basham described the purpose of each exercise and demonstrated how to perform it. Then, everyone tried out the exercise. They



learned modifications for their own level of fitness, safety pointers, and how to increase the difficulty when they were ready.

Once they reached the end of the stations, everyone returned on their own, following the maps that were provided. As Pinkham commented, "participants discovered not only an opportunity for physical wellness, but also mental stimulation and quiet meditation in a wonderful outdoor setting."

**Planning tips:** Pinkham suggests "introducing activities that are right under people's noses, yet they just haven't taken the time to explore. Ask the question: Is the activity new, different, cutting edge or just the same old thing packaged in a new way? Remember to keep it simple.

"Get the word out in as many ways as possible, making sure that all are welcome to explore, share and participate. Always recognize and thank the organization with whom your organization is working, including with a letter to the local newspaper after the event.

"On the day of the event, be there, welcome folks, take pictures and if possible share the experience and participate."

Make sure participants have a supply of water and arrive with appropriate footwear, adds Kelly Holbrook who leads the Wellness/Rehab team at Miles. Remind them to talk while they walk (to monitor exertion) and move at a comfortable pace. Most of all, have fun.

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**Places**

- Fitness trail
- Forest Walk for Seniors
- Greenbelt Walk-A-Thon
- Noon hour walk along community walking trail
- Power Walk in Downtown (with local historian)
- Stroll through The Five Senses Garden (part of a recreational trail)
- Urban hike
- Urban poling
- Walk between the parks
- Walk in nature center
- Walking Wellness at botanical garden
- Water shed hike
- Wildflower hike

*Active Aging Week 2007, 2008*

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**Senior Health & Fitness Walk**  
 New Brunswick, New Jersey

**Features:** Drawing participants from over 15 towns thanks to transportation provided by seniors centers, the walk took place at a large park with accompanying health screenings, lunch, music, T-shirts and other giveaways.

**Organization:** Middlesex County Department on Aging

**Marketing:** Posters were hung in the seniors centers and flyers were distributed to the centers and nutrition sites. The walk was advertised in the information section of the senior’s meal menu and a story on the walk was published in local newspapers.

**Participation:** 400+ older adults

**Event:** As a special countywide event, the walk was co-sponsored by seniors centers throughout Middlesex County. Participants were bused into Roosevelt Park from over 15 towns. The walk was coordinated by Andrea Boulton, supervisor of public information & special projects at the county’s Department on Aging.

Roosevelt Park covers 217 acres and has a lake, walkways and picnic areas. The walking route circled a lake, and the older adults chose the distance they wanted to walk. Markers were erected to show the distances at one-quarter, one-half and one mile.

Water was donated and distributed at water stops along the path, during lunch and at the main walk location during the raffles.

Before the walk, a local hospital and the department of health offered free blood glucose and blood pressure screenings. There were information tables from local organizations who gave away free literature. Music was provided by a DJ, an older adult who also joined the walk.



Walkers registered before the event at their local seniors center or the Middlesex County Department on Aging. Registration allowed the seniors centers to know how many walkers would need transportation, and enabled Boulton to have a count to order box lunches (provided through the seniors meals program), bottled water and goody bags. The T-shirts, lunches and goody bags were paid for from the Department on Aging’s budget; in other years some of these items have been donated.

The walkers were joined by volunteer students from Rutgers University’s Exercise Science Department. The students helped throughout the day and accompanied seniors as they walked. In a prior year, Boulton reached out to the university, and since then the exercise science department has collaborated with the Department on Aging on multiple projects. As Boulton observed, “The Rutgers students are a wonderful addition to the walk.”

All the seniors centers and some companies donated a gift basket and a raffle ended the event. “Overall the walk was a huge success and enjoyed by all,” concluded Boulton.

**Planning tips:** Set the date for the walk very early and publicize it. Because the walk is outdoors, Boulton announces an alternate day in the event of rain.

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## Windmill Island Walk Holland, Michigan

**Features:** Members of the walking club organized the day's walk at a local landmark. The club's volunteers handled transportation, organized a presentation on the location, and accompanied newcomers along the trail.

**Organization:** EC Striders Walking Club at Evergreen Commons Senior Center

**Marketing:** The walk was included in a press release that announced multiple Active Aging Week events. The press release was sent to the local newspaper and to the local radio station. Fliers were posted throughout Evergreen Commons, especially in the fitness area. An announcement was placed in the Center's monthly newsletter, the Courier.

**Participation:** 40-50 walkers

**Event:** At the Evergreen Commons Senior Center, the walking club is very active, with weekly and monthly walks and travel to special walking locations. An involved volunteer leadership is instrumental in organizing the events.

For the Active Aging Week Windmill Walk, members of the EC Striders Walking Club (their motto is "Walking is winning!") took charge. The destination of Windmill Island is relatively near to the town. The island is home to a 240-year-old working Dutch windmill, and has 36 acres of gardens, dikes and canals.

To reach the location, walkers could drive or ride on an Evergreen Commons bus. At the island, the caretaker gave a brief presentation on the history of the windmill. The trail around the island is two miles long, showcasing views of the wetlands and a river, with flowers and birds.

The self-paced walk followed the club's usual three-speed structure: turtle for the



slower pace, hare for fast walkers, and frog for people who walk at a pace between slow and fast.

Fitness Director Karen Draeger pointed out that the EC Striders' "leadership team makes sure all newcomers are made to feel welcome and will walk with people so that no one walks alone."

After the walk, everyone adjourned to the seniors center for "Dutch treats" of coffee and pastries. The EC Striders paid for the treats out of their operating fund, collected from nominal yearly dues to the club.

"Not only did members learn some things new about the historic site, they also had a great time connecting with each other," summarized Draeger. "It also was a great recruiting event as new members were added to the Striders Walking Club."

**Planning tips:** Plan walks based on ease of access, member interest and safety. The club uses member suggestions as the primary source of locations and activities.

**Active Aging Week 2009  
Sept. 21-27**

**Host an event!  
Start today!**

[www.icaa.cc/activeagingweek](http://www.icaa.cc/activeagingweek)

## Step log

Jot down the number of steps you take each day.

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

	Number of steps
Longest walk	Monday _____
	Tuesday _____
Nicest route	Wednesday _____
	Thursday _____
	Friday _____
Notes	Saturday _____
	Sunday _____
	Total _____