

# Walking facts and figures 2: Participation in walking

## Walking as recreation

**Walking is Britain's most popular outdoor recreation by far.**

**Millions of people in Britain regularly walk in the outdoors for leisure.**

- According to Britain's most comprehensive survey of sport and recreation participation, 9.1million adults in England, or 22% of the population, walk recreationally for at least 30 minutes in four weeks. This is almost twice the number that swim (5.6million, 13.4%), more than twice the number that go to the gym (4.5million, 10.7%) and nearly three times the number that cycle (3.5million, 8.5%) (Sport England 2009a).
- In Scotland, 30% of adults walk recreationally at least 3km/2 miles in four weeks. 16% swim and 10% cycle (SportsScotland 2008).
- Almost a third of adults in Wales (31.6%) walk recreationally for at least 3km/2 miles in four weeks. 12.3% swim and 5.4% cycle (Sports Council Wales 2005).
- Around 63% of English adults walk for leisure at least once a year, and around 20million people say they walk for leisure at least once a month (TNS 2008).
- 38% of English adults have used a "strategic recreational route" such as a National Trail or long distance path in the past year (TNS 2008).
- Over 2billion adult days are spent on walking as a leisure pastime every year in the UK (Sheffield Hallam SIRC 2004).
- Walking is the joint most popular activity (along with eating out) for people taking days out in England, and the most important reason for 18% of the 3.6billion trips per year. It is the main activity on 36% of countryside and 33% of seaside visits (Natural England 2006).
- Walking is the most popular activity for UK visitors to Scotland, with 47% of trips (5.7million trips) involving some walking (VisitScotland 2009).
- Walking is the most popular activity undertaken by visitors to Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2009).
- Walking in the countryside is the fifth most popular activity among overseas visitors to Britain (VisitBritain 2009).
- 70% of domestic tourist trips in the UK involve walks under 2 miles/3.2km (UK Research Liason Group 2002).
- Of 386.1million trips on the National Cycle Network per year, 191.4million, or around half, are on foot (Sustrans 2009).
- A third of adults in Britain say walking for more than 10 minutes is their only form of exercise in a typical month (National Statistics 2002).

*More information about participation in walking organisations can be found in factsheet 3: Provision for walking.*

## Walking as transport

**Walking is still very important as a mode of transport, especially over short distances.**

- Nearly all journeys involve walking, often to connect with other transport modes.
- 23% of all journeys in Great Britain are made entirely on foot (Department for Transport 2007a).
- 75% of journeys under 1 mile/1.6km are made entirely on foot (DfT 2007a)
- The average person travels 315km/197 miles a year on foot, or 3% of total distance travelled (DfT 2007a).
- The average length of a walk journey is 1km/0.6 miles. Only 5% of journeys are over 2 miles/3.2km (DfT 2003).

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- The most popular reason for walking is to go shopping (21%), followed by education (including escort education) (20%), and leisure or social purposes (20%). 17% of walk trips are 'just to walk' including dog walking (DfT 2007a).
- People walk more in cities. Almost a quarter of trips in London are entirely on foot, while only 2% are by bicycle. 30% of trips by Londoners are on foot, of which 80% are less than 1km and only 4% more than 3km. Many more trips use walking for part of the journey (TfL 2010).
- 25% of British households do not have access to a car (National Statistics 2002)

### Walking is the single biggest means of accessing public transport.

- In addition to journeys entirely on foot, the average British adult makes 78 journeys per year combining walking with public transport.
- 42% of these are mainly by bus (DfT 2003)

## Who walks?

- Almost everyone is capable of walking. Only 4% of people either need help when walking outside the home or are unable to walk on their own at all (DfT 2003).
- However participation in walking varies with age, gender and social factors.

### Gender

- Leisure walking is enjoyed almost equally by both men and women. Fractionally more men walk than women: in England, 22.7% of men walk for at least 30 minutes in four weeks but only 21.2% of women (Sport England 2009b).
- These figures should be compared with overall participation rates in sport in England: around 20% for men but under 13% for women (Sport England 2009c).
- When all walking is taken into account, British women make 15% more walking trips than men, and on average walk 14.5km/9 miles more per year: 321.5km compared with 307km (DfT 2007a).

- It seems easier to engage women with walking projects. In the first five years of the England-wide Walking for Health project (then called Walking the way to Health), 73% of participants were female (Dawson et al 2006). 55% of Ramblers members are women.

### Age

- More people aged between 25-55 walk recreationally than those in other age groups (Sport England 2009b).

At least one 30 minute walk in last 4 weeks								
Age	16-	25-	35-	45-	55-	65-	75-	85+
%	20.9	26.6	26.7	26.6	22.3	14.6	6.5	2.3

- Walking is more likely to be maintained later in life than sport – sports participation drops from 16% in the 35-54 age group to 7.6% in over 55s (Sport England 2009c).
- The age groups that do the most walking overall are under 17s of both sexes (around 317 trips per year) and women aged 30-39 (330 trips per year). While walking trips by women decline with age, to 219 in the 60-69 age group, walking trips by men increase, from 177 at 30-39 to 252 at 60-69. Walking declines for both sexes in the 70+ age group (DfT 2007a).
- It seems easier to engage older people with walking projects. Most participants in the first five years of Walking for Health were 65-74 (Dawson et al 2006). The average age of Ramblers members is 55, or 51 for new joiners.

### Ethnicity

- White people are more likely to walk: 23% of white people walk for at least 30 minutes in four weeks but only 13.5% of non-white people (Sport England 2009b). Participation in sports is roughly equal for white and non-white people at around 16.5% (Sport England 2009c)

### Household income

- People in professional jobs are more likely to walk for recreation than those in lower paid work. Around 28% of professionals walk for at least 30 minutes

in four weeks compared to only 14% of those in routine manual jobs. Those who have never worked and the long-term unemployed are slightly more likely to walk at 14.5% (Sport England 2009b).

- Leisure walking participation is higher than sport across all socioeconomic groups, but with a similar distribution. 18.4% of professionals participate in sport but only 12.6% of manual workers (Sp Eng 2009c).
- Overall, however, people living in low income households are more likely to make walking trips than those in higher income households (DfT 2007a).
- Children in the lowest income households in England are 25% less likely to be sufficiently active for good health than children in the highest income households (Craig et al 2009).

## Walking trends

### The popularity of leisure walking appears to be rising.

- The number of English adults walking recreationally for at least 30 minutes every month increased by 954,700 (around 10%) between 2006 and 2008 (Sport England 2009).
- Out of walking trips for all purposes in 2006, 17% were 'just to walk', including walking dogs. This figure has risen from 12% in 1986 (National Statistics / Department for Transport 2007a).
- However a recent study focused on family walking found more than half the people surveyed said they walked less now than ten years ago (Roberts 2010).

### Walking overall has declined but may be stabilising.

- Between 1986 and 2005, the average proportion of journeys on foot fell from 34% to 23%, a decrease of 32%.
- In the ten years from 1995 to 2005 the average number of walk trips per person fell by 16%, from 292 to 245 per year.
- Total distance walked per person per year fell from 390km/244 miles in 1986 to

around 320km/200 miles in 1995 and seems to have stabilised, with the average trip length going up slightly. The proportion of trips between 1.6km/1 mile and 3.2km/2 miles has increased from 25% to 31% in the past ten years, suggesting people walk less often but take slightly longer journeys on foot.

- People living in households with a car walk less than those in households without a car. Men who are the main driver of a company car walk least of all.
- The decline in walking journeys is largely accounted for by trips that have transferred to the car. Car ownership has increased from 30% of households in 1961 to 72% today.

(DfT 2003, DfT 2007a, National Statistics 2003, 2005).

## Walking to school and work

### School

- 79% of primary school students live within walking distance (less than 2 miles/3.2km) of school (DfT 2003).
- Only 49% of primary school children and 44% of secondary school children regularly walk to school (DfT 2007a), though two thirds of children are now walking to school at least once a week (Craig et al 2009).
- Among the 51% of primary school children living within 1.6km/1 mile of school, 80% walk to school. 29% of secondary school children live within 1.6km/1 mile of school and 92% of them walk there (DfT 2007a).
- 40% of people born in the 1930s travelled to school alone at age 10-11, but only 9% of those born in the 1990s (Pooley et al 2005). This is one of a number of increasing restrictions on British children's independent mobility which is not paralleled in comparable countries such as Germany (Hillman et al 1990).
- In 1976 only 15% of children were driven to school (National Statistics 1976), rising to 38% in 1997. The increase has since levelled off, rising to 41% in 2006 (DfT 2007a, Sustrans 2007).

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- At its peak around 08:45 on schooldays, the school run accounts for nearly two in ten (18%) car trips by residents of urban areas (National Statistics 2008).
- Children who have not walked to school at primary level have less chance to develop road safety awareness and are therefore more vulnerable when they walk to school independently at secondary level (Walk to School 2008).
- A study of school children in Buckinghamshire showed that 80% of those taken to school by car would prefer to walk (Jones 2002).

### Work

- Currently only 11% of commuting trips are on foot (DfT 2007a), down from 13% in 1991. Twice as many women (15%) walk to work as men (7.3%) (DfT 2003).
- The vast majority of commuting trips, 69%, are by car (DfT 2007b)

## Attitudes and barriers

### Attitudes to walking

- 95% of adults agree that walking is a good way to stay healthy and 82% agree it is a good way to lose weight (National Statistics 2005).
- 73% of adults agree that pedestrians should be given more priority. 97% believe we should be encouraged to walk more to improve health, 94% to improve the environment and 92% to ease congestion (National Statistics 2002).
- A key attraction of walking is that it is a sociable activity (Ipsos MORI 2006, Dawson et al 2007, Milton et al 2009). In one study 56% of people claimed they would walk more if friends and family joined them (Roberts 2010).
- Participants on health walks schemes say social contact, improving health and enjoying the natural environment are their main motivations for walking (Hynds & Allibone 2009).
- When choosing a place to walk for leisure, people value landscape qualities, lack of traffic and good personal safety

above route quality. People also value nearby, convenient routes (TNS 2008).

- Children tend to have more positive views than their parents on the social, health and environmental benefits of walking as transport (Lorenc et al 2008).
- Views and perceptions on walking vary by age, sex, location (urban/rural) and other factors (ibid).

### Barriers to walking

- According to Ramblers research and experience, the most frequently reported reasons for not walking are:
  - Lack of time
  - The weather
  - Unattractive walking environments
  - Fears for safety and personal security
  - Lack of knowledge of the walking environment and/or of the benefits and ease of walking
  - Lack of motivation
- People tend to overestimate walking time and distance (TfL 2008), often misled by inaccurate perceptions of local walking geography and inadequate information (AIG 2006).
- The most important barriers to walking and cycling more for transport among children, young people and their parents are the culture of car use, including convenience and status; and fear and dislike of the local environment, especially around traffic and “stranger danger”. Parents drive their children in response to social expectations around children’s safety (Lorenc et al 2008, BHF 2009).
- Perceptions of attractiveness and safety of the local walking environment are generally good. 72% say they feel safe walking on their local streets and 74% agree their local area is a pleasant place to walk. However this declines to 55% and 57% respectively in deprived areas (National Statistics 2005).
- A study of attitudes to leisure walking routes found the main reasons people didn’t use routes were lack of time and a lack of awareness of what was available locally (TNS 2008). Another study found

39% said they would walk more if they knew the most appropriate walks (Roberts 2010).

- A study in Cheshire found lack of knowledge, concerns for personal safety and worries about potentially challenging terrain dissuaded use of off-road paths. Many respondents also wrongly believed that walks of less than an hour are of no benefit (Faber Maunsell 2003).
- In a study of US students, the biggest reported barriers to walking were lack of time, too much to carry and concerns about perspiration or appearance (Dunton and Schneider 2006).
- Older people with a health problem that restricts walking are more likely to identify other barriers to walking in their local environment (Dawson et al 2007).

### Potential for change

- Other European countries have higher walking levels than the UK and less inactivity-related health problems such as obesity (Bassett et al 2008).
- According to Ramblers research and experience, key motivators to walking include socialising with friends and family, relaxing and getting time to think, exploring the environment and enjoying the outdoors. Many people enjoy physical activity and are motivated to do more of it, but may be distrustful of health messages perceived as too “preachy”. Few people will choose to walk purely out of concern for reducing the environmental impact of transport.
- Social contact, improving health, enjoying the natural environment and a sense of achievement are key motivators for those attending organised health walks programmes, although an individual’s background and the convenience of walks will also influence choices. Many of those attending such programmes are already interested in walking and/or nature (Hynds & Allibone 2009).
- Walking environment counts: for example a scheme in Wanstead, east London, to improve and light walking routes through a local park achieved a 122% increase in evening walking levels (Redbridge 2010).
- People with initially negative attitudes to walking quickly become more positive if they can be persuaded to participate in walking, including those from deprived communities (Ipsos MORI 2006).
- An effective community based approach is essential when encouraging inactive people to walk, working with existing community organisations and carefully targeting messages and activities (BHFNC 2009, NICE 2008). 94% of participants on Ramblers Get Walking Keep Walking programmes said the programme had made them more active (Travel Actively 2009). The Furness Families Walk4Life project, which used a similar approach but through Sure Start Children’s Centres, also showed increases in walking (Milton et al 2009).
- Primary schools participating in the Walk Once a Week / Walk on Wednesday scheme, which rewards children who walk to school with a monthly badge, have walking levels of around 60% on the school journey, compared with the average of around 50% (Wavehill Consulting 2009).
- Between 25% and 40% of car trips in urban areas are less than 3km/2 miles (about 45 minutes walk). For about half of these, there are practical or physical reasons that favour the car, but the rest could in principle be walked (or cycled) instead, and are only taken by car as a result of habits and attitudes (Socialdata / Sustrans 2004, Sustrans 2008).
- Personalised travel planning projects that provide customised expert advice to guide people’s transport choices typically achieve “modal shifts” of 4-5% from car to walking trips and can be more effective when used alongside physical improvements (DfT 2005). Some projects have increased daily time spent on active travel by 18% (Sustrans 2008).

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**Compiled and published by the Ramblers**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW, GB**  
**T: 020 7339 8500**  
**[www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)**