

# Step Challenge

Guide for group leaders



**TAKE THE NEXT STEP AND**

**CHOOSE TO**

**LIVE BETTER**

## Welcome

Most people in Northern Ireland do not take enough exercise to prevent ill-health. Inactivity is described by the Department of Health as a “silent killer”. Evidence is emerging that sedentary behaviour, such as sitting or lying down for long periods, is bad for your health, and is thought to increase the risk of many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes, as well as weight gain and obesity.

Walking can do wonders for our wellbeing. It’s good for our bodies, our minds and - because it gives us the chance to get out and meet new people - it can be great for our social lives too.

To help get people active, we are promoting a Step Challenge across Northern Ireland which is aimed at encouraging people to increase the number of steps they take each day. Ideally, we would like people to aim for 10,000 steps a day. However this may seem daunting for some, so it is important to set a target which is realistic and achievable!


We know that people are more likely to stay motivated if they take part as a group. This might be with friends or family, work colleagues or through a local community organisation.

### That’s where you come in.

As a Step Challenge group leader, you’ll help a small group of people to get started, increase their confidence, stay motivated and complete their own personal Step Challenge.

This guide for group leaders includes the following sections:

- Getting started page 3
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As a group leader, it is important that you use the booklet **Take the next step** to guide you and your participants during the challenge. Throughout this toolkit, you will see the symbol  to remind you to refer to the booklet. This booklet is available on our website [www.choosetolivebetter.com](http://www.choosetolivebetter.com)

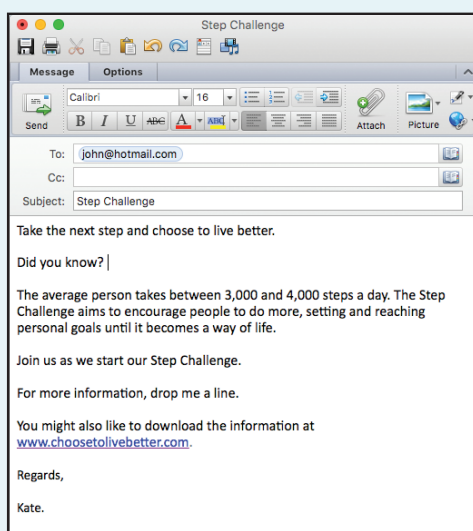
At the end of this guide, we offer a summary of what to do, and when. You can also download templates for posters and certificates from our website, and graphics for you and your group members to use on social media.

## Getting started

Let us know you are going to be a group leader. Fill out the registration form at the back of this pack – there is a freepost address to post it to or you can email us the details at [stepchallenge@hscni.net](mailto:stepchallenge@hscni.net)

Decide how to recruit your group. Some ideas include:

- Email



- Poster (download from our website)



- Graphic for posting to social media (download from our website)



If you need but don't have use of a computer or printer, you could try your local library for free computer use and internet access.

Of course, the old ways might still be the best for you, and a chat face-to-face could do the job!



## Reminder



People who haven't recently been very active should start slowly and build up gradually. Remind them of the information in the booklet. *"If you have a pre-existing health condition or haven't been physically active for a long time, ask your GP's advice before starting the challenge".*

Decide how long you want your group's challenge to last, for example 6, 8 or 12 weeks. You might consider 6 weeks, with the option to extend by another 6 weeks if group members are keen. Research shows that people who increase their activity level for at least 12 weeks are more likely to keep their new habit long term.

Decide how many people will be in your group and how often you want to meet. Other examples we have seen have shown that five or six participants can work well. If you have lots of people keen to take part, you might consider setting up several groups, and perhaps even some competition between them!

Help your participants plan how they will track their step count. They can use a pedometer or other wearable fitness tracker. They could also use a smartphone app, but that relies on the person remembering to carry their phone with them all the time.



Information for participants about what to look for in a pedometer is in the booklet along with advice on how to wear a pedometer properly.

If your group is made up of work colleagues, you might consider approaching your employer to see if they would pay for any pedometers that you need.

## What's your number?



To start their challenge, each member of your group should track how many steps they take over a normal day. The average person takes between 3,000 and 4,000 steps each day. Encourage them to record their step count each day for a week, then add them up and divide by seven to get their daily average. The booklet includes a step log or you can download a separate one from the website to print out.

Agree your group goal. It could be:

- to each achieve 10,000 steps a day by the end of the challenge;
- for each participant to increase their daily average by 3,000 steps by the end of the challenge;
- to compete with each other, or another group, and celebrate the person or group who best increases their average daily step count; or
- something else that you or your group dream up!

## Know your stuff

The Step Challenge is based on evidence about what works and what doesn't work to help people become more active. From the evidence, we know that feeling good and feeling confident are important for people taking part. We also know that even small increases in activity can improve health and wellbeing.

To help your participants, you might:

- Encourage them to take support from family and friends. This is known to be helpful. Support can include practical help, eg helping to free up their time, being a walking buddy during the challenge, or simply offering praise for trying to change (whatever the result).
- Help them to make a plan to be more active. You could encourage and assist them to set a realistic 'step goal' for the week ahead or indeed for the duration of the challenge.
- Find out about local opportunities for walks, or other options for being more active.
- Help them to see that they are capable of being more active. Encourage their confidence. It can be helpful for them to see how well they have been doing, particularly when compared with their goal.
- Acknowledge when they are finding it challenging. You might find it useful to read the article "[Overcoming the barriers to exercise](#)" on the NHS Choices website at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

You might also remind your participants of the benefits of being more active. It can improve your quality of life by helping you:

- get a better night's sleep
- maintain a healthy weight
- manage stress

## Develop confidence in your participants

Key messages to promote include:

- “It is important to set realistic goals.”
- “Think about your reasons for starting the challenge. Remind yourself of them regularly.”
- “If you don't reach your target, try again tomorrow.”
- “Doing something is better than nothing.”
- “Every bit of extra activity benefits your health.”
- “Try to work out what might get in your way. Prevent it or plan a way to get round it, if you can.”

As the group leader, you could:



- contact your participants regularly with tips to help them add more steps to their day.
- share information about local events and opportunities to walk. Encourage your participants to share information and ideas too.

If you rely on social media, remember any participants who might miss out. Perhaps you could include them in a different way, eg email, text message.

I've signed up to the Public Health Agency's #StepChallenge

For info on the Step Challenge visit [www.choosetolivebetter.com](http://www.choosetolivebetter.com)

HSC Public Health Agency

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## Keep the momentum up

Chart and promote the progress of the group. We have supplied a template for this (page 10).

Invite and enable group members to share their experiences, good and bad, during the challenge.

Even with all your hard work, you might lose a participant. If you think a participant is struggling to stay involved, contact them. See if they need help. Remember the benefits of being active and your key messages (page 6).

If they do choose to leave the challenge, remain supportive. They have made the first steps in becoming more active. You could point them to [www.choosetolivebetter.com/content/getting-active](http://www.choosetolivebetter.com/content/getting-active) for other ideas.

For your other participants, you might need to recalculate any group goals.

## Challenge complete... what next?

Hopefully your participants will be considering ways to maintain their increased activity as part of their daily routine and as a lifelong habit.

In wrapping up, you will again be using your leader knowledge and skills. For example, you might help your participants to identify how they plan to keep their step count up, tomorrow and forever!

We have provided a certificate template for participants. The certificate can be used to celebrate their achievement in the challenge, and to record their intentions moving on from it.

Your group might want to extend their challenge. Or you might decide to start recruiting again and lead a new group of participants.

Your original participants could be the group leaders of the future! You could share this guide with them and help them get going. Other options include becoming a walk volunteer.



Further information on opportunities to keep active is included in the booklet.

## Results

**How well did your group do? How was your experience of being a group leader?**  
**We would love to hear from you.**

We need to make sure that the Choose to live better Step Challenge is having a positive impact on people's lives and helping them build and maintain their activity levels.

This means monitoring and evaluating is vital. We will write to a sample of Step Challenge group leaders who have registered their group with us.

We want to find out what group leaders think of the Choose to live better Step Challenge.

We will also ask those leaders to involve their group members, so that we can see who has joined the challenge and what they thought about it.

If we write to you asking you to take part in our evaluation, please do so.

## Key days for leaders

The main days for leaders are

1. The day on which people 'sign up' and start counting their steps (Day zero)
2. A date when they set their goals (this should be Day 8 or later)
3. Interim dates thereafter that you decide.
4. Challenge end date.

**Programme launch (date)** ..... **(Day zero)**

On this day you could

- Register participants.
- Provide information and encouragement.
- Help participants decide how they are going to count their steps. If this means wearing a pedometer, help them apply the information in the booklet about how to wear it. If they want to use the weight-mate app, help them install and use it.
- Help them decide how they are going to record their steps (on paper/using an app).
- Ask participants to share (with you) information about local opportunities to walk more.
- Ask them back after seven full days.
- Register your group with us (see page 11).



## Return for goal setting (date)

(Day 8 or later)

On this day you could

- Help participants calculate their daily average step count.
- Record this on your group chart (see page 10).
- Support each participant to set record their own goals.
- Share with participants information about local opportunities to walk more.
- Organise participants into small groups if you have a large number of people involved.
- Register groups on the app, if being used, and assign participants to those groups.
- Distribute questionnaires to your group members (these will be posted to you after you register your group with us). Once completed, collect them from group members for returning to us.

## Interim dates, during the challenge

On these dates you could

- Offer participants emotional, social and/or practical support.
- Help participants monitor their progress against their goals.
- Help them address any barriers.
- Gather step counts and record the whole group's progress.

## End date

On this day you could

- Gather final week's step counts and record the whole group's progress.
- Review participants' progress against their targets.
- Help participants identify how they will maintain and further increase their activity levels.
- Review the achievements of the whole group. Were targets reached? How do participants' most recent seven days compare with their very first week of collecting step counts?
- Distribute questionnaires to your group members (you will receive these from us). Once completed, collect them from group members for returning to us.
- Consider with the group whether to extend their challenge, or any of the elements within it.



## Registration form (to be returned to the PHA)

Your name.....

Name of your group.....

Are you attached to a community group? Yes/No

If yes, name.....

Are you a group of work colleagues? Yes /No

If yes, name.....

Name of organisation/employer (if applicable)

.....

Address of organisation/employer

.....

.....

Postcode.....

Phone number.....

Email address.....

Email to [stepchallenge@hscni.net](mailto:stepchallenge@hscni.net)

or

Print and send (no stamp needed) to:

Business Reply RTCX-XLZT-GUYC  
Public Health Agency  
The Baths, 18 Ormeau Avenue  
Belfast  
BT2 8HS



Public Health Agency

**Public Health Agency**  
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.  
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

Find us on:

