

An Underground Guide to the Breast Cancer Walk

*A Journey of a Thousand Miles
Must Begin with a Single Step*



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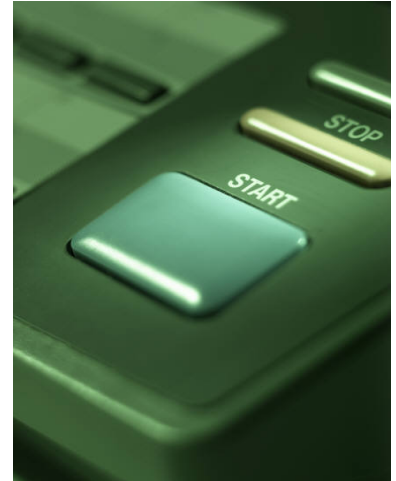
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Prelude

Maybe you've already walked in previous years, and are just looking for a few new tips to make your Walk even easier and more enjoyable. Or perhaps you've decided to do the Walk for the first time this year, and are looking for help to answer the thousands of questions that popped into your head (right after the first question, which is usually "What was I thinking when I signed up for this?"). Maybe you are considering walking, and a friend or relative has passed this along to you, thinking it might convince you to join them on the Walk. Whatever the reason, I hope you'll find the following pages helpful, amusing and perhaps even a bit thought provoking.



I've walked or crewed many Walks, including the original Avon 3 Day, the new Avon 2 Day, the new Komen 3 Day, as well as a wonderful event called "Out of the Darkness", which raises money for suicide prevention programs (www.theovernight.org). Over the course of doing all these different Walks, I've learned a thing or two that you might find useful. For years, I posted random tips and bits of unsolicited advice to the message boards (more on that later). But after one Walk in 2005, someone on one of the message boards suggested to me that "you should write a book." While I was flattered, I didn't think that the world was in need of yet another book. But just in case this might be helpful to some people, I figured it wouldn't hurt for me to sit down and collect all those random thoughts and emails into one document.

In the following pages, I'll use the word "Walk" (capitalized) as a generic term. Whether you are participating in the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer (2 day format, with either a 26 mile or 39 mile total route) or the Breast Cancer 3 Day (3 day format, with an approximately 60 mile total route), the majority of this information will apply to you. If the difference in the Walk format has some implication for a particular tip (e.g. towel service), I'll try to make that clear as well.

The tips are divided into 3 sections, "Before the Walk", "During the Walk", and "After the Walk." (Hey, I never said this was rocket science...) As you read it, you may find that a tip in one section might be better suited to another section, you may disagree vehemently with a particular tip, or you may have other tips that you think I should add. I'd welcome your feedback; my email address is on the front page of this document.

Also sprinkled throughout the document are topics that are each referred to as an "Interlude", each a bit of a change of pace which you may or may not find interesting or amusing.

Finally, feel free to share this with others. There is no charge for this, other than a simple request on my part. If this was of any benefit to you, please find someone you can help in some way, and help them. Hopefully, you'll consider it a small price to pay, and the person you help will appreciate your kindness.

Before the Walk

Training

Training to walk 13, 20 or 26 miles in one day can seem like an insurmountable task, especially if you've never done anything like this in the past. And the thought of walking that sort of distance for 2 or 3 days in a row can, at first thought, be overwhelming. Despite that, you'll be surprised at how much you are actually capable of doing. However, until you try, you won't really believe me. The key is to just get started with your training.



I like to remind people that you aren't really walking 13, or 20, or even 26 miles at one time. To keep things in perspective, remember that you are only really training to walk 2-3 miles at a time between stops. And you have plenty of time during the days of the actual Walk to get to the end of the Route, even with unhurried stops at every single rest area to drink, stretch and use the ubiquitous porta-potties. It's a Walk, not a race. Keep that in mind as you train.

Training is important. No matter what physical shape you are in, it isn't realistic to plan to "just show up and walk." Walking for that many miles in one day, followed by another day or two of distance walking (after having slept on the ground in a tent), will use different muscles and require a different level of endurance training than, say, playing tennis for an hour at a time. Even people who have run marathons will find that there is a difference between running for 4 hours on one day, and walking for 8-10 hours a day, for multiple days. No matter how good your physical shape, you need to train. At the same time, even if your idea of exercise is walking into the kitchen for a snack, you can train and be able to successfully complete your Walk. The key to training is the same as the key to actually doing the Walk; take it easy and take care of your body.

Most people who train but are unable to finish the Route during the Walk find it is due to dehydration (or hyponatremia, see more on that below), injury (sprained muscles are a common issue) or blisters, and **not** due to exhaustion. The purpose of training is not only to develop your endurance, but also to accustom your muscles to being used for hours at a time, to develop good habits when it comes to hydration and nutrition, and to learn to recognize the warning signs of foot problems (so that you can prevent blisters, rather than treating them). If you can get your leg and back muscles into shape, learn how to stay properly hydrated, and avoid blisters, the odds are that you'll have no problem finishing the route each day.

For some people, finding time to train can be a challenge, especially if you have to juggle parenting and a job. Many people find that walking for even 45 minutes during their lunch break each day is a great way to add to their weekly mileage. Another option, depending on where you live, and the time of year, is to walk outside (on a well lit sidewalk, with a walking partner and a cell phone) after the kids are in bed for the night, or before your spouse leaves for work in the morning. If finding someone to watch the kids over the weekend while you train is a problem, consider setting up a "babysitting cooperative" with some other walkers. Each weekend, you agree to watch their kids for a few hours in the morning, and they agree to watch your kids for a few hours in the afternoon, so everyone has a chance to do some long training walks. Or, arrange for the non-walking spouses and kids to get together for a "play date" while you are walking. They will get to know each other and can even plan how/where they'll cheer you on during the actual Walk

If possible, see about becoming part of a group in your area that is training together. For many people, walking with other people is a lot less boring than walking alone. And even if you are training for a Walk in another city, you can still train with people in your home town. For example, no one minds if you are

training with people in your area who will be doing a 3 Day Walk locally while you plan to participate in an Avon Walk in another city.

Another issue that comes up is "How do I do long training walks, and deal with replenishing water, sports drink, snacks, and using a bathroom? I don't want to lug all that food and water, and I can't find any clean public bathrooms." This can be particularly tough for people who feel that they can't stop back by their house (either because they don't want their kids/spouse to see them, or because they are worried they'll be tempted to quit early).

One technique that has worked well for some people is to use a (supportive) friend or relative's house as your "Start", "Rest Stop" and "End Point." Start there, and leave a stash of drinks and snacks there as well. Walk a few miles in one direction (e.g. North), then turn around and walk back. Use the friend's house for the bathroom (if you aren't peeing every few miles, you aren't drinking enough!), and replenish your snacks, water and sports drink. Then head out again in another direction (e.g. East), walk a few miles, then return and repeat in another direction (e.g. West, South).

Essentially, you'll be walking in a clover leaf pattern. As your training distances increase, simply increase the distance of each out/back leg. There are advantages this approach:

- You are able to replenish food/drinks on a long walk without having to lug it with you the whole time
- There is less temptation to stop walking than if you were stopping at home
- Your kids (and spouse) aren't there to distract you from focusing on training
- Walking in different directions is less boring than doing the same loop repeatedly.

Another option is to plan your route to include a fast food restaurant or convenience store. That can provide a chance to use a bathroom, discard any trash, refill your water bottles, and get a snack if necessary.

One last thought on Training. Take advantage of the coaches and mentors provided by your Walk, and by local training walk volunteers. They can be a great help in getting you through motivational problems, training issues, and even fundraising problems.

Raising Money



The web site for your Walk contains lots of good advice on fund raising. I won't duplicate it all here. Just consider one thing: it is much faster if you can get 25 pledges of \$100 each (totaling \$2,500) then it is to get 250 pledges of \$10 each (totaling \$2,500).

Many walkers are afraid to ask for money. They make things more difficult for themselves by asking for small amounts ("even \$10 will help"). Bake sales or selling pink lollipops are an extreme example of this approach. It can take a lot of time and effort to meet your minimum fundraising commitment by trying these approaches. While there is nothing wrong with raising money this way, consider whether there are more effective ways to spend your fundraising time (and reduce your stress). Since I'm a business executive (in my "real life"), I tend to look at this from an ROI (Return on Investment) perspective. How much time do you put in to raise how much money?

In my experience, if you ask for \$10, you will get \$10. If you ask for \$100, you may get it. Or you may get \$50, or \$25, or \$10, or nothing at all. But it doesn't hurt to ask. The fact is that people are likely to be more generous than you expect, so when you ask, don't ask for the minimum. Let the donor decide what they can afford, rather than giving them "an easy way out."

Remember to consider your entire "personal network" when it comes to fundraising. While friends and close family are a great place to start, also remember your co-workers, your extended family, donations from your company, and donations from service providers such as your family accountant, physician or attorney. You may be surprised at how generous some of these people will be, particularly if they or a loved one have battled breast cancer.

Another thing to remember is "Tax time" at the end of the year. In the last weeks of December, many people make their charitable donations for the year, in order to make them deductible for that tax year. If it isn't too late, try to get your first round of fundraising letters (or emails) out by then, to take advantage of that behavior.

Finally, there are some very creative ideas that people have come up with. One of my favorites is a fundraising yard sale. Solicit your relatives, friends and neighbors for items that you can sell, with the stipulation that all the proceeds will go to your fundraising efforts for the Walk. You help them clean out their basement, attic and garage, focusing on items that can sell at a decent price (e.g. furniture, small appliances, bicycles, sporting goods, etc.). You handle the logistics and take the time to do the yard sale, and the money goes to a good cause. Check out the message boards for other good fundraising ideas.

Interlude

People ask me how I got started with the Walks. It was actually a combination of events.



The Route for the Washington D.C. Avon 3 Day in 1999 passed about a block from my home. It was 102 degrees that day (really!), and I was driving along the Route to the supermarket. I watched from the comfort of my air-conditioned car as throngs of women walked down the street. I'll always remember one gorgeous woman, about 6 feet tall and at least 300 pounds, in a tight spandex outfit, striding along with a bright red face and an enormous smile. My first thought was "Are these women insane? What would compel them to be out exercising on a day like this?" But as I saw the signs at a nearby Rest Stop, I realized that they weren't just out for a stroll. I remember thinking "wow, these women are committed..." (Crazy, but committed).

My wife walked the 3 Day the following year, along with a couple of friends and relatives. After Day 1, she ended up in the Emergency Department of the local hospital due to hyponatremia (more on that under Hydration, below). She spent the night on a gurney, hooked to an IV, and I brought her home about 6:00AM on Day 2. I was under the (mistaken) impression that she was done for the weekend. But after a few hours of sleep, some food, and a hot shower, she insisted I take her back to the Camp, because she was planning to walk on Day 3. I thought she was crazy, but who was I to argue?

When I brought her to the Camp, I was amazed by what I saw. The sea of blue tents, the dining tent, the shower trucks, and the sense of camaraderie made quite a positive impression on me. Despite all that, I was sure she would be calling me in an hour or two, to come back and get her again. Once again, I was wrong. She was so committed to the Walk that even after a night in the hospital, she slept in Camp, and then walked the whole next day.

I went to pick her up at Closing Ceremonies on Day 3, and was moved to tears (literally) by the power of what I saw and what I heard. It finally dawned on me (I'm a slow learner) that maybe they weren't all crazy. Maybe there was a whole new perspective on this. On the ride home, I told her that if she wanted to walk again next year, I would walk with her. Ostensibly, I was walking with her to make sure she didn't end up in the ER again. But the reality was that I wanted to become a part of the Walk. I walked the next year, and have been a part of the Walks ever since. I usually crew three different Walks each year (typically a combination of DC, Philadelphia, NY and Boston, though I'm always open to exploring new cities).

The Message Board



I'm always surprised when I hear that most people aren't aware of the Walk message boards. Every Walk has a message board on their web site. Anyone who is registered for that Walk can use the message board, free of charge. It is a great place to ask questions, share ideas, gather tips and get emotional and moral support. In fact, many of the things in this document first appeared on various message boards over the years.

I'd encourage you to learn how to access the message board for your Walk. You'll find it a great source of information, as well as a great source of emotional support as you train, fund raise, and walk. Many people find that the message board is a virtual community, where they can share not only their experience with the Walk in particular, but their personal experiences as a survivor of breast cancer, or as the relative or friend of someone who is fighting breast cancer.

However, bear in mind that the message board is made up of lots of people, with lots of opinions. It's not uncommon to hear conflicting opinions on things. On occasion, people can get a bit emotional about a topic or issue. On rare occasions, people momentarily forget their manners, and write things that can be hurtful or a bit offensive, or that can be perceived that way.

So as you use the message board, remember to take any advice with a grain of salt. And remember to be kind to others, as you would want them to show kindness to you.

Packing

I wanted to share some tips that should make packing your gear easier for you. There is a lot here, but it might help alleviate some of your stress about getting ready for the Walk.

The packing list on the Web site is a complete list of what you MIGHT need. Check the weather a couple of days before the event to see if you'll really need a sweatshirt, rain gear, parka, etc. Just because something is on the list does not mean that you have to bring it.



As a rule of thumb, your clothing (with the exception of your jacket, sneakers, fanny pack, sleeping bag and air mattress/pad) should fit into a paper grocery bag (just to measure). If you've got more than that, you may be bringing too much. Not only do you want to make sure you don't exceed the weight limit on your gear (and be considerate of the Gear crew who will have to haul it for you), but remember that you'll have to carry your gear to your tent at the end of the day.

Your toiletries should all fit easily into a paper lunch bag (again, just to measure). Don't bring full size bottles of shampoo, bath size bars of soap, etc. Bring trial sizes or the little bottles you get at hotels. And don't bring a blow dryer for your hair, since there is nowhere to plug it in.

If you are bringing medication, you may want to pack your morning and your evening meds in little zip lock baggies, appropriately labeled for day and time (e.g. Day 1 Evening, Day 2 Morning). Pack the bags along with your clothing for that day and time. This may help remind you to take your medication regularly and on time. Also, make sure you list **all** the prescription medications you are taking on your medical form, in case you have a medical problem and the medical staff needs to be aware of what you are taking.

While we are talking about medications, you may want to keep other over-the-counter medications in your fanny pack, also in separately labeled little zip lock baggies. While the medical tents will have common over-the-counters medications (such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen), they may not have your favorite antacid, or allergy pill.



If your Walk provides "towel service", then you should take advantage of it. Historically, the 3 Day Walk has provided towel service, while the Avon 2 Day Walk has not. You don't need it on the Avon Walk, since you'll shower once at the end of the first day, and then bring home your wet towel. But on the 3 Day, you'll be showering twice (after Day 1 and again after Day 2), there won't be any way to effectively dry out your towel in between, and you won't want to bring 2 full sets of towels. If they offer towel service, it is worth the price (typically \$10 for clean dry towels each morning and evening).

If you do need to bring a towel, remember one important thing. It doesn't have to be a beach towel, bath sheet, or something gigantic. Trust me, no matter what YOU might think when you look in the mirror, your body is not that big.

You may want to bring a separate hair towel (since there are no blow dryers), depending on how much hair you have. If you have particularly thick or long hair, you may find that you'll go to bed with wet hair, and wake up with cold and wet hair. One suggestion that some walkers have made is to use a couple of paper towels (provided at the sink area) to "blot" the moisture out of your hair. They say that it sucks up all the extra water, and your hair will actually dry! Since I haven't had long hair since I was in college, I can't vouch for this, but it does seem to make sense.

Another option to consider for towels is to purchase an "ultra light" or camp towel from a camping or outdoors store. Ultra-light fabric absorbs water like a sponge and will wring out almost completely dry. They are compact, and many have a hang loop for drying convenience and a zippered mesh pouch which can be used for storage

Don't bring anything valuable or of tremendous sentimental value. You probably don't have to worry about theft, but things do get lost, or broken or covered in mud.

You know those hundreds of free return address labels that you get from every charitable organization in the world, in hope that you'll feel guilty and send them a check? Well, now is a good time to use them. Put one on your camera, even if it is a cheap disposable camera. Put one on your cell phone. Put one on your hat. That way, when you accidentally leave it somewhere, we'll be able to get it back to you. Each year, the Crew finds dozens of phones, cameras and hats in the Rest Stops and in Camp. If you have your name and address on it, someone will be able to return it. If you don't, you may never see it again.

Separate your clothing into what you need by day/night (e.g. Day 1 morning, Day 1 night, Day 2 morning, etc.) You don't need much for the evenings, as most people shower, put on their pajamas or other sleeping

stuff, go to dinner, then go to sleep. Put each set of clothing into a 2 (or 2.5) Gallon zip lock bag (if you can't find them at your local supermarket, try Target), and squeeze out all the air (have a kid or a friend sit on it while you zip it shut). When it is sealed, the bag should look "vacuum packed", and is now air-tight and waterproof. Write on the bag, with a wide tipped permanent marker, the contents (e.g. Day 1 AM). This has 3 benefits. It makes the bags easier to pack (since they take up less space), it makes it much easier to find your clothing as you rummage through your gear (in the dark), and it keeps things dry in case your bag gets wet.

You may be wondering "how can my gear get wet?" Your bag will be packed onto a large box truck, along with a couple of hundred other bags. When the truck gets to Camp, all the bags on the truck will have to be unloaded. Why not leave them on the truck until a walker needs their bag? Imagine the delay, the chaos and the amount of grueling work if the gear crew unloaded the entire truck to find one bag, then reloaded them all again, repeating the process for each walker, just to keep the bags out of the rain?



The bags will be placed on the ground, and if it looks like rain, they will throw a plastic tarp over them. If it is raining when the first walkers come in, they will grab their bags, and (hopefully) try to replace the tarp. In the meantime, any rain water that has collected on top of the tarp will spill onto the bags below. And this process will be repeated over, and over, and over again, for hours. If it rains, there is a good chance that your gear bag will get drenched. And that is why you want to make sure that **everything** inside your bag is packed in water-tight plastic bags.

If you plan to bring a pillow, consider bringing a small (camping) pillow. If you want to bring a full size pillow, try to roll it up into your sleeping bag, in order to compress it.

Put your sleeping bag (rolled up, or in a stuff sack) in a large (clean) plastic trash bag, sit on it (to squeeze out the air), and then twist tie it shut. The bag should look "puckered". Leave it for an hour, and then check to see if air leaked back in. If so, then repeat the process. If not, the bag is now air-tight, and waterproof.

If you've done all this, your things will take up much less space (since you aren't packing extra "air"), you can use a smaller (and lighter bag), you'll have more room in your tent, and your things will stay dry if (when?) your bag gets rained on.

Your gear should weigh no more than 35 pounds. And 35 lbs is a LOT of gear. The simplest way to measure it is to weigh yourself on your bathroom scale, and then weigh yourself holding your fully packed duffel bag. The difference is the weight of your duffel and gear. If you can't manage to lift it to hold while you weigh it, then you have too much stuff!

Put something "unique" on your duffel bag to make it easy to identify. There will be 250 seemingly identical black wheeled duffel bags (available at Target for about \$30) on each gear truck. Attach something to yours that will make it easy for you to identify. No, a pink ribbon is not a unique idea.

Bring a flashlight that can be "hands-free" (either one with a lanyard you can put around your neck, or one with a headband). When you go to the porta-potty at night (and you will go to the porta-potty at night), you will need a light (there is no light inside!), and you will find it easier if you don't have to dedicate one hand to holding a flashlight, or worrying about it (or you) falling in.

Bring 2 extra large garbage bags and some twist ties. If your tent feels cramped, you can put your duffel bag into a garbage bag, tie it shut, then inside a second bag, tie that one shut too, and then leave it outside overnight (the bags keeps it all nice and dry).

You will want to have something with you during the Walk to hold your water bottle, and any other sundry things you'll be carrying along with you (e.g. tissues, cell phone, camera, extra socks, etc.) Some people use a waist pack, or "fanny" pack. Other people prefer a back pack. There is no right answer. You may wish to try different things while training, until you decide what works best for you. Once you make your decision, make sure to train with the equipment you are going to use. Also make sure that you train while carrying the approximate weight that you will be carrying on your Walk, for instance, full water bottles, extra socks, sunscreen, etc.

Interlude

My wife and I did a Walk together one year. But just one.

We tried training together. I got us lost. I refused to ask for directions. She was not happy with me.

We tried fund raising together. I sent out a couple of dozen emails to business associates, with a link to my web page. I told them my goal was \$10,000 and asked them each for a minimum of \$100. She sent out a couple of dozen printed letters to friends and family, with hand addressed envelopes, and stamps. She told them that even \$10 would help. I hit my minimum in 48 hours, and my goal in about a week. She worked very diligently for months to raise funds. She was not happy with me.



Then came the actual Walk. We walked together. On Day 1, she stopped at every bathroom. No, not just every porta-potty, **every** bathroom along the Route. Every fire station. Every donut shop. Every 7-11. Every single bathroom. Plus every porta-potty. It took us almost 12 hours to finish the Route. I was not happy with her.

We shared a tent together. She got up every hour, to use the porta-potty. Every single hour. Open the zipper. ZZZIIIPPPP!!!! Close the zipper. ZZZIIIPPPP!!!! Off to the porta-potty, as I fall back asleep. Then 3 minutes later, she is back. Open the zipper. ZZZIIIPPPP!!!! Close the zipper. ZZZIIIPPPP!!!! Guess who woke up again? I was not happy with her.

We don't do the Walk together anymore.

Sleeping



Even in the heat of the summer, it can cool down at night. Even 60 degrees at night can feel cold when you are sleeping outside. And I've done some walks when it has dropped into the 30's overnight. Making sure you are warm and comfortable at night is critical to getting a good night's sleep.

There are many kinds of sleeping bags. They range in quality, price, size and comfort. Unless you are planning to do a lot of camping, you may be better off borrowing a good sleeping bag from a friend or relative (maybe a local Boy Scout?). You can buy an inexpensive sleeping bag, but they tend to be bulky, and not terribly warm. Don't even think about bringing the Little Mermaid sleeping bag that you got your daughter for her 5th birthday. It will take up a lot of room in your gear, it won't keep you warm, and your tired, sore toes will get jammed in the bottom zipper.

If you only have a lightweight (cotton or polyester filled) sleeping bag, consider bringing a flat flannel sheet, or a small down comforter, to supplement it for cold nights. On warmer nights, you can sleep on top of your sleeping bag and use the sheet as a lightweight blanket.

Some Walks, I bring both a light weight sleeping bag, and a small down comforter (which squishes down quite small into a zip lock bag and doubles as a pillow). That way, I am comfortable on a warmer night, and can use them together on a cool night. If I know it will be cold at night, I'll bring my down sleeping bag (which is lightweight, packs small, and is very warm).

Sleeping bags are great for warmth, but don't provide a lot of cushioning. If you are an experienced camper, or a very sound sleeper, then sleeping on the ground on a sleeping bag may be just fine for you. The tents are usually on grass. To get a good idea of what it would be like, find a patch of grass, lay out your sleeping bag, and crawl in. If you feel comfortable, great. Otherwise, consider bringing either an air mattress or a camping pad.

Air mattresses are inflatable. Since you aren't likely to want to blow it up at the end of a long hard day, and since there is no electricity available to run a pump, I'd strongly suggest a battery operated pump. They are a bit heavy, but if you are going to bring an air mattress, they are an absolute necessity. Many people who are sharing a tent with a close friend of relative bring a queen size air mattress, which will take up most of the floor space of the tent. This is fine if you are comfortable "spooning" with your tent mate. If you don't know your tent mate, a queen size air mattress is probably a bit presumptuous.

However, if you use a queen size air mattress, there won't be much room left for your gear. Consider double-bagging your gear and leaving it outside

Another alternative is a camping pad (sometimes called an "air pad"). These are typically thin pads that self-inflate when you roll them out. They are nowhere near as comfortable as an air mattress, but they are much smaller (to pack) and lighter (to carry). Since they tend not to re-inflate all the way if they have been stored tightly rolled for a long period, remember to blow in a few puffs of air after you unroll it, and before you close the inflation valve. This will cause it to inflate to the maximum thickness, and make you much more comfy!

Strapping

Each year, walkers come up with the bright idea of putting their sleeping bag in a large plastic garbage bag, and attaching it to the outside of their duffel bag, to give them more space to pack their gear in the duffel bag. This is not as bright an idea as they'd like to think. In fact, this is one of the biggest mistakes you can make in preparing for the Walk.



Yes, technically, you are "allowed" to attach your sleeping bag to the outside of your duffel bag, as long as you don't use bungee cords (since they can snap and injure a crew member). You are also "allowed" to walk all 20+ miles in high heels, wearing a scuba diving suit, a mink coat and a ski hat. Just because something is "allowed" doesn't mean it is a good idea.



When you drop off your gear each morning, it will be loaded, along with a few hundred other bags, onto a 24 foot box truck. The truck will be loaded wall to wall, floor to ceiling, with bags. And while the gear crew will try to be considerate, let's remember that the gear crew is made up of volunteers, moving literally thousands of pounds of gear on and off the trucks each day.

This is not the Ritz Carlton. Your bag may be tossed. Your bag may be dragged. Your bag may be dropped. Your bag may be on the bottom of a pile of other bags. If you strap your sleeping bag outside your duffel

bag, it is likely that it will get lost, or it will get torn, or it will get soaking wet in a rain shower. Or maybe all of the above!

Now let me tell you what will happen if your sleeping bag is lost/torn/wet. We don't have spares on the Walk. If it is only torn, consider yourself lucky. If it is lost or soaked, you will go over to the Medical tent, where you will get a Mylar "space" blanket. If you aren't familiar with the term, a "space" blanket is a thin sheet of Mylar (sort of like Christmas tinsel, in a big sheet). If you wrap it around you, it will retain your body heat, and keep you warm. We use them in the Medical tents for warming walkers who are hypothermic (a fancy way of saying "freezing cold"). Unfortunately, it will crinkle/rustle/wrinkle every time you move. Which means while you may be warm, you will have a heck of a time sleeping. I can't think of many things worse than trying to sleep on the floor, wrapped in Mylar, let alone after having walked 20 miles that day. Though perhaps it would be even worse to share a tent with someone else trying to sleep while wrapped in Mylar!

If your sleeping bag won't fit into your duffel bag, get a bigger bag, get rid of some of the other things you were planning to bring (I told you that you had too much!) or have someone help you pack more efficiently. If you happen to have an adult male around the house somewhere, this is a good time to solicit their help. While I'm the first to admit that men are useless in most situations, some can be good at packing (it has something to do with the Y chromosome and a more intuitive grasp of spatial geometry....)

Tenting

You will be sleeping in a small 2 person tent. There will be literally thousands of other tents around you, in long rows. When you register (typically the day before the Walk), you will have the option of choosing a tent mate. If you don't choose a tent mate, another walker of the same gender will be assigned to you. Since it is a charitable event, and not a pick-up bar, you won't randomly be assigned a room mate of the opposite sex (sorry guys...)



Co-ed tents are permissible, as long as the tent mates request each other. Please bear in mind that the tents are not soundproof, so discretion is highly recommended.

There are different tent sections for walkers and for crew. That way, when some of the crew gets up at 4:30 AM (no, I'm not kidding), they won't wake up the walkers. Of course, they will wake up the rest of the crew, but such is life.

It is possible for a crew person and a walker to share a tent, but the tent will be in the crew section. That way, the only walker being disturbed by early rising crew members will be the walker that chose to share a tent with a crew person.

It's just my opinion, but if you are walking, I think you'd be better off sharing a tent with another walker, even a stranger. You'll get more sleep, and interact more with other walkers. Most Walks, I share a tent with a stranger, and I've met lots of wonderful people that way (they may not have felt the same about me, but such is life). If the thought of sharing a tent with a complete stranger makes you uncomfortable, you can often "meet" someone via the message board or from a local training group before the Walk, and then decide if you want to share a tent with them.

If you know your tent mate in advance, try to coordinate who will bring what. That way, you won't both lug along a battery powered lantern, or air pump, or plastic tarps, or a windsock to identify your tent.

When you register, you will be given a tent number (something like C47). Your tent number tells you the row (e.g. Row C) and the number tent (#47). When you get to camp, you'll pick up your gear from your Gear truck (e.g. Truck C), and grab a tent. You'll find the tent spot marked C47, and put up your tent.

Please make sure to put your tent up in the correct spot, and not to expand into another spot. This sort of tent "creep" causes a ripple effect. Eventually, someone will go to put up their tent, and find that they only have an 18-inch spot to put up an 8 foot wide tent. Also, you must put your tent in your assigned spot. In the event of an emergency or a lost phone/camera, this is the only way someone can find you.

Putting up a tent only takes about 3 minutes, so don't spend the next 3 months worrying about it. Two important things to remember when it comes to putting up your tent:

- Remember how you put your tent up. You will take it down, in the exact reverse order. If you have no idea how to put up a tent, don't worry. There will be plenty of crew (in blue t-shirts) and experienced walkers around to help you put it up, if you are clueless.
- As soon as the tent is up, put something inside it (even just a fanny pack will do). Otherwise, if a breeze comes along, your lightweight nylon tent will fly across the field. I am not making this up. And there is nothing funnier (or sadder) than watching someone who just walked 20 miles running across a field, chasing their empty tent.

When you get your tent, it will probably fit neatly into the nylon bag. Contrary to the Walk mythology, it is actually possible for you to get the tent back into the bag. Just remember these tips:

- Fold it into quarters before you roll it up.
- Roll it towards the tent door, so any excess air can escape
- Roll it around the collapsed tent poles, to keep it nice and tight

If this makes no sense to you, don't worry. It will when the time comes.

Bring warm clothing for sleeping. 50 degrees might sound pretty warm, but when you are sleeping outside, it might not feel quite so wonderful. Bring something warm to sleep in (e.g. sweats, or even thermals), just in case you get cold at night. Tents do not keep out the cold. And even if you are toasty warm in your sleeping bag, when you get up in the middle of the night to use the porta-potties, you will wish you had something warm to wear.

Bring something you can hang outside your tent to identify it at 3AM when you are coming back from the porta-potty, and trying to find your tent in an endless sea of identical blue nylon tents. And no, a pink ribbon, or a pink bra, is not a unique/original idea for a tent decoration. The alternative to making your tent easily identifiable is to walk up and down every row, "whispering" loudly for your tent mate. This is not only considered gauche, but is liable to make you decidedly unpopular among your fellow walkers.



Tents are not soundproof. Just because the people in the adjoining tents can't see you doesn't mean they can't hear you. Keep your voice down when in your tent. If you use your cell phone from inside your tent, try to berate your husband quietly for not making sure the kids took a bath, or whatever else he did or didn't do that day. And turn off your cell phone after 8PM. That way, the whole Camp won't get woken up when your husband calls at 11PM to ask how to turn on the dishwasher....

Rain



You'd be surprised how often it rains on a Walk. And sometimes, it even snows (again, I'm not kidding). While the tents are, theoretically, waterproof, I wouldn't bet on it. Waterproofing can wear out over time, and it is unlikely that you will have a brand new tent. I doubt your duffle bag is really waterproof, either.

Plan to bring two THIN plastic drop cloths (9'x12', 1 or 2mm thick, used for painting, you can find them in Home Depot or Lowe's) to help keep the water out of your tent. Don't bring the heavy tarps that you would use to cover your firewood! They are heavy, bulky and don't do a better job than a medium weight tarp.

Also bring 8 clothespins (if you have them) or black binder clips (available at any office supply store, or steal them from your office, as long as you don't work for me!). Use 1 drop cloth to line the inside floor and up the inside walls of your 8'x8' tent. Put your gear and sleeping bag on top of the tarp inside your tent. Put the other tarp over the TOP of your tent (on top of the "fly", or tent cover, that is provided). In case of rain, it will keep you from getting wet from water leaking into your tent. Make sure to clip the tarp tightly to the top of your tent, otherwise it will flap in the breeze and drive you crazy as you try to sleep. To prevent your tent from getting "stuffy" while you sleep, you might want to leave the tent door open a few inches at the top (but keep the mesh "screen door" fully closed), or open the "window" in the tent (not every tent will have a "window").

In theory, you can put the drop cloth UNDER your tent instead of inside. This is a spectacularly bad idea. You are just creating a "swimming pool" that your tent will sit in if it rains. The rain will drip off your tent, onto the drop cloth under your tent, and come up through the floor of your tent (which is not really waterproof). You will find yourself soaked in the morning, floating on your air mattress. Trust me on this; put it INSIDE your tent.

It is also a good idea to bring a small camping towel (see more on camping towels in the Packing section, above). Also pack that in a zip lock bag, and put it on the top of your duffel bag. That way, if your gear gets wet while sitting outside in the rain, you have something to use to dry the plastic bags off. On one event, my bag got drenched in a brief rainstorm. I used the chamois to dry the zip lock bags, and then threw them in my tent. Then I poured about a gallon of water out of my empty duffel, wiped the bag dry, and threw it in my tent. Voila, no wet stuff!

If it rains, there is a good chance there will be mud. If there is mud, the crew will try to put down sheets of cardboard in heavily trafficked areas (e.g. the food lines in the dining tent), so that you don't have to walk through the mud. Try to avoid taking a shortcut through the mud. It is not unusual for someone to step into mud that turns out not only to be deeper than they thought, but deep enough to suck the sneaker right off their foot. This is not as much fun as you might think, especially if you are the one who has to be rescued from the mud, or if you are the one who has to dig your sneaker out of a foot of mud.

Interlude

You will be showering in a large shower truck. There are typically many showers for women, and a few for men. This is due to the fact that there are many more women than men on a Walk. Despite the disproportionate number of showers for women, there tend to be long lines at the women's showers, and short lines for the couple of men's showers.



On the Walk I did with my wife (this will be important later in this story), I was in the dressing area of the men's shower truck, after having taken my shower. In the dressing area with me were two other guys, one who was almost fully dressed, and another with nothing on but a towel. I was wearing sweat pants and putting on my t-shirt. This will all be relevant in a moment, so pay attention.

Suddenly, we hear a woman's voice announce "ok guys, the line is too long for the women's showers, so we are coming in to use the men's showers." We thought she was kidding. She was not. Next thing we know, three attractive women, in running shorts and tops, come into the men's shower. At this point, the first guy is standing there stark naked, holding his towel. He starts to blush. One of the women, probably in an attempt to make him feel less embarrassed, decides to say something to him to reassure him. Now I'm guessing that she meant to say something like "don't worry; it's nothing we haven't seen before." Unfortunately, what she actually said was "don't worry; it's nothing worth looking at." Ladies, you'll have to trust me on this, but no guy ever wants to hear a woman say that to him.

He blushes bright red, gets dressed as quickly as possible, and bolts out of the shower truck. The rest of us smile as he leaves, and then we all introduce ourselves. One of the women starts to get undressed, and then realizes that she is stripping in front of two guys who are complete strangers. She pauses, and looks at me and the other guy, who smiles and announces "It's ok, I'm gay." She continues to get undressed. Then she looks at me, and says "Larry, you are gay too, right?" I smile sweetly, and announce "Actually, I'm straight." Well now it is her turn to blush.

Since I like to at least pretend that I'm a "gentleman", I decide that maybe it is time for me to leave and give them some privacy. (Besides, I couldn't plausibly continue to take that long to put on my socks without looking suspicious.) I go outside, and use the sinks outside the shower truck to shave, and brush my teeth. There were probably a dozen other people by the sinks. A few minutes later, this woman, in sweat pants and with her hair wrapped in a towel, comes up to me and starts apologizing. It took me a minute to realize it was the woman from the men's shower, the one who had gotten undressed. And without thinking (really!), I blurted out "I'm sorry, I didn't recognize you with your clothes on." Well everyone around cracked up.

So, I'm thinking that I got the better of her in this little interaction, and got revenge for the guy who "wasn't worth looking at."

The next day, my wife and I are at a Rest Stop, waiting in line for the porta-potties along with about a thousand of my wife's closest friends and training buddies. Suddenly, I hear a familiar voice calling out loudly (very **loudly**) "Larry, Larry, is that really you?" as she points to me. I turn to look at her, and so does everyone around me. I realize that it's the woman from the shower. And as everyone watches, she smiles sweetly and says "I'm sorry, I didn't recognize you with your clothes on."

Did I mention that my wife doesn't do the Walk with me anymore?

During the Walk

Walking Alone



Some people worry that they are doing the Walk "alone", that they won't know anyone and that they'll have trouble meeting people. The funny thing is that walkers who show up "alone" at Opening Ceremonies usually meet people BEFORE the Walk even starts, meet people throughout the Walk, and often make friendships that will last a lifetime.

There are going to be thousands of walkers, and a couple of hundred crew, and 99% of them would **love** to meet you. Now that might sound like "fluff", but I've been on quite a number of events, and I've been consistently amazed at the kindness of people who were total strangers just one day earlier.

Many of us walk with friends, with family, as part of a team. We look forward to sharing the Walk with our training partners, and our loved ones. But let's not lose sight of the fact that some of us arrive at the Walk alone. Walking all those miles is hard enough, without feeling like you don't know a soul, or worrying about having to eat on your own.

So please, those who are with a group, make an effort to include those who are alone. Reach out to someone at Opening Ceremonies, at the first Rest Stop, at lunch, or in the Camp at night. Invite them to join you, as you would want them to include you if you were alone.

Feet

Blisters occur when your feet get hot & sweaty, making socks stick to your feet. The sock and foot then rub against each other and the inside of the shoe, causing friction burns. As the outer layer of skin separates from the inner layers, the space between fills with lymph fluid. Further pressure on the inner layer of skin irritates nerve endings, causing discomfort.



To put it in less technical terms, blisters suck. You work so hard to train, and all it takes is one blister to ruin the Walk for you. After years of walking and crewing, I've seen blisters so large that a single one literally covered the bottom of the whole foot.

So, **how can you absolutely guarantee that you will have blisters of biblical size**, ensuring that you will be hobbling by Mile 5?

- Don't train. That way, the skin on your feet will be nice and soft when you start the Walk.
- Buy a cheap pair of walking sneakers, in the same size as your regular shoes, and preferably a pair that rub against your foot with every step
- Buy cheap cotton socks that hold in the moisture, ensuring that your feet stay hot and sweaty
- When you feel a "hot spot" while walking, just ignore it. Maybe it will go away on its own.

On the other hand, you **are a lot less likely to have problems with blisters if you:**

- Train (to toughen up your feet)
- Buy running shoes that are professionally fitted and a half-size larger than your street shoes
- Buy wicking socks that don't absorb and hold the moisture from your sweaty feet. Change your socks at least once during the day (which means you need to bring plenty of pairs of clean socks).
- Stop walking **immediately** if you feel a hot spot (no, don't walk to the next Rest Stop, by then you may have a blister. Stop on the side of the road, and put on a piece of moleskin)

On a quasi-related note, make sure your toenails are cut short before the Walk. For some people, the rubbing of the front of their toe nail against their running shoe will cause a blood blister under their nail, which is horribly painful, and which will ultimately cause you to lose your nail. However, make sure you don't get a pedicure less than a week before the Walk, so you give your toes and cuticles a chance to heal up before you start the Walk.

Many experienced walkers prefer wearing running shoes rather than what the footwear industry calls "walking shoes." While this is also a matter of opinion, many people find that running shoes are lighter, more flexible, and more shock absorbent. The design of the sole and heel provides a heel to toe walking motion which may help reduce the chance of shin splints.

Some people swear by what are called "walking sandals." I have no experience with them, but as with anything else, I'd strongly suggest that if you are going to try them, you use them for a couple of long training walks before you make a decision one way or the other.

Finally, there is the issue of what sort of goop to apply to your feet. Some people suggest powder on your feet. Some people swear by Vaseline, or Body Glide, or some other cream, lotion or potion. Whatever you find that works for you during training, use during the Walk.

When I walked, I didn't want to take any chances, so I used it all, at the same time. Don't ask why, but I used a layer of Body Glide, followed by a layer of Vaseline, followed by a layer of powder. I squished when I walked, but I didn't get any blisters. However, I did have to throw away my socks after the Walk, since they were caked in goop. I wouldn't recommend this approach.

Pedometers



People often ask "Should I use my pedometer on the Walk?"

No. And for those of you who insist on more detail, and enjoy arithmetic.....

Each year, some walkers use a pedometer during the actual Walk, and report on the message board that "Day X was actually 25 miles, not 20 miles!", or some such. At the risk of preventing this year's version of that perennial Board Game (pun intended) "Let's argue about the Distance of the Route", a few facts:

- The Route is measured, in advance, by literally a dozen different people, in at least a half dozen vehicles.
- When we are told "Today's Route is 20 miles" it means that it is 20 miles (give or take a half mile or so)

So, why do the "pedometer people" say "it was actually 25 miles, not 20 miles!" (And NO, it is NOT because people walked an extra 5+ miles in Camp, or made really excessive trips to the porta-potties!)

Pedometers are calibrated based on your individual stride, typically using a measured distance (e.g. a high school track). Say it takes you 1,000 steps to walk a quarter mile around the track. That means it takes 4,000 steps to walk a mile, at THAT pace. And 4,000 steps times 20 miles equals 80,000 steps per mile ("your actual mileage may vary")

On the actual Walk, you won't be walking at the same pace as when calibrating your pedometer. At times, you'll be walking slower, sometimes much slower. You'll be on narrow sidewalks, walking behind some slower walkers. You'll be sore, or a little tired after sleeping in a tent. You'll be having a great chat with a

slower walker, and won't be at your training pace. As a result, instead of it taking 4,000 steps to do that mile, maybe it will take you 5,000 steps per mile.

And if you do the math again, you'll find that 5,000 steps times 20 miles would equal 100,000 steps per mile (again, just for example)

So what's the problem? Well, your pedometer "thinks" that it is supposed to count off a mile for every 4,000 steps. And it does that during the actual Walk. Except, because you are tired/slow/chatty/whatever, it should really be counting a mile for every 5,000 steps. After 100,000 steps, it "thinks" you walked 25 miles (100,000 divided by 4,000) when you actually only walked 20 miles (100,000 divided by 5,000). See, I told you there would be math involved....

Feel free to bring your pedometer, if you like the way it bangs against your side as you walk. But please, don't bother looking at it, and if you do look at it, don't believe what it says!

Interlude

Many women go on the Walk, and leave their husband, father or boyfriend in charge of their home while they are gone. I'm sure this must have seemed like a good idea at the time.



If you are going to leave a man in charge, might I suggest a couple of tips to ensure that your home, and your relationship with that man, are still intact upon your return:

- Teach him the difference between dish washing soap, and dish washer soap. If you don't feel that it is necessary to cover this, at least make sure he knows that he can not use the vacuum cleaner to clean up the suds that cover the kitchen floor.
- Your kids are not likely to starve to death or die of malnutrition while you are gone. That said, it can't hurt to remind him that Fruit Loops are not really fruit, ketchup is not really a vegetable, and pizza is not really a basic food group.
- While it might seem illogical to him, try to convince him that a pan of brownies actually will not bake in half the time if you double the temperature of the oven.
- Make sure to leave the number of your veterinarian. That way, if he does set the oven to 550 degrees to bake those brownies, and the smoke detector goes off, and the dog gets knocked unconscious when it runs into the sliding glass door, he'll know who to call.
- Arrange for someone to deliver dinner on Sunday night when you get home. You'll be too tired to want to go to a restaurant, you definitely won't want to make dinner, and the odds of him successfully cooking an edible meal (since he'll be exhausted from taking care of the kids) are somewhere between slim and none.
- Ask a friend to drop off some flowers at your house on Sunday afternoon. This is the best way to guarantee that someone will give you flowers when you get home from the Walk.
- Write down the kids' bed times. Otherwise, he will put them to bed "when they seem tired", which is a euphemism for "when I remember, and when there is a commercial." Unless you want to come home to some cranky, over-tired kids, write down the kids' bed times.
- Don't ask him to do the laundry while you are gone. Just don't. Yes, he should be able to. But if you ask him, he is almost guaranteed to bleach things that shouldn't be bleached, put things in the dryer that shouldn't be dried, and generally ruin some of your favorite clothing. Just don't ask.

Did I mention that my wife left me home in charge of the kids when she walked that first year?

Tips while Walking

Pace yourself. It is ok to take a break to stretch, drink and pee at every rest stop. Don't rush. A little known fact about the Route is that we open it in stages during the course of the day. If you are walking very quickly, and are way out in front, you will probably be "held" (i.e. you'll have to wait) for a while at some Stop along the Route, until we open the next part of the Route. Even if you like to walk at a brisk pace, take the time to relax at each Stop (and please don't try to convince the crew that your muscles will tighten if you can't keep walking, or that you need to catch a flight. We still can't open the Route early just for you.)



Take the time to enjoy the Walk. Don't rush through the day, in order to get to camp "early." Stop at each rest area. Stretch. Eat. Drink. Schmooze. Talk to the other walkers, and the crew. Ask them why they are doing the Walk. If you are walking with friends, make sure to spend some time away from them, so you can meet new people. If you see someone by themselves, introduce yourself.

You don't have to finish the Route each day. No one will know, and no one will care. However, remember that if you take a 30 minute break at **every** Stop, you won't have time to finish, and we'll have to bus you to the Camp.



You should bring sun glasses. The glare from the road can get pretty rough after a few hours. If you are wearing sunglasses, or regular glasses, it is a good idea to have a strap or string to hold them on. That way, they are unlikely to fall into the porta potty. If they fall in, you won't want to retrieve them.

Wear sunscreen. You will be outside in the sun for many hours, and you will get fried if you don't apply, and regularly reapply, sunscreen. I don't really care if you already have a wonderful tan, or if you never get a sun burn. On a Walk like this, the last thing you want is to have chafing against sun burned skin, or trying to sleep on the ground, in a sleeping bag, with a sun burn. And yes, people of African, Asian and Hispanic descent can and do get sun burns. Wear sunscreen. Even if it seems cloudy.

Some people find that their lips get dry while walking. Lip balm can help, and if you can find some with sunscreen in it, so much the better.

Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer with you in your fanny pack. You can find them at a local drug store in the sample section for 99 cents. While there are sanitizing towelettes and/or gel at the porta-potties, it is nice to have your own supply for those other times when you want to clean up a bit. I've been told that there is a small bottle of Purell hand sanitizer that attaches to, and "hangs" from your fanny pack. This way you do not have to unzip, get it out, and then put it away!

Stretch. Regularly. Thoroughly. Constantly. And not just your legs. Stretch your arms, your back, and your neck. You'd be amazed at how tight all your muscles can get from walking.

Chafing can be a problem while walking (anywhere that cloth rubs against skin, or skin rubs against skin, as you walk). If you find that you are getting irritation or a rash during training walks, go out and buy some Body Glide. It is a lubricant that comes in a stick (like deodorant), and you apply to wherever you have

chafing. It works extremely well, and will last a lot longer than Vaseline. You can find it in most running stores, and some sporting goods stores. Some people also use it on their feet, to prevent blisters.

Wiggle your fingers, preferably with your hands above your head, as you walk to keep the blood flowing, and minimize the swelling in your hands. Yes, this looks ridiculous. But it will help.

Don't hoard snacks. There will be more food along the Route every few miles. You won't starve, I promise. Hoarding is unnecessary, and a bit selfish. Plus why carry that extra weight if you don't need it?

Bring extra socks during the day. Putting on clean socks at lunch is a thin slice of heaven. Pack your extra dry socks in a zip lock bag, so that you can put the dirty/sweaty ones back in your fanny pack without having them touch all your other things. Some people also like to bring a change of dry underwear as well.

Take your shoes off at lunch and let your feet breathe. Wash your feet with some cool water (an old infantry trick.) Dry them thoroughly before putting your clean socks on. You'll be surprised at how great your feet will feel.

When you take off your socks, check again for hot spots, red spots or blisters. The sooner you treat them, the less trouble you'll have later in the Walk.



Do **not** use anything on the Walk that you haven't used during training. On some Walks, you will get a "goodie bag" with all sorts of lotions, powders, etc. They are all great products. But as with any product, there is a chance you may have an allergy or sensitivity to some ingredient. You really do not want to find out during the Walk that you are allergic to the new sunscreen you just smeared all over your body. This is not a hypothetical concern. One Walk, I used a sunscreen on my face that I had never used before. When I started sweating, it dripped into my eyes. It took a lot of water to get rid of the burning sensation.

Don't wear your iPod while walking. It is unsafe, as it might distract you, and prevent you from hearing someone warn you that you are about to get hit by a bus or a speeding ambulance while crossing the street. It also sends a not-so-subtle message to the walkers around you that you have absolutely no interest in talking to them.

Please don't talk on your cell phone while actually walking. If you want to make or take a call, just step off to the side. Walking and talking on a cell phone, especially when you are tired, is the quickest way to trip and fall. Do you really want to miss the rest of the Walk, due to a sprained ankle or knee, just for that one call?

Hydration

You must bring your own water bottle, or Camel Bak (basically a light backpack with a built in water container and a sipping tube). On some Walks, a sponsor will give water bottles away, but it is not a good idea to count on it. Bring your own.

If you are using a water bottle, bring a WIDE-MOUTH one. It is much easier to refill, you can add ice (if available at the Rest Stop) and you won't end up spilling water or sticky sports drink on your arm or foot each time you refill it. Plus it makes things go quicker at the Rest Stop for everyone if people can refill their bottles more rapidly.



At many Rest Stops, there will be ice in a cooler that you can put into your water bottle. Please do **not** pick up the ice by hand; use the scoop or spoon provided. There are a number of walkers at each Walk who have compromised immune systems (due to a recent round of radiation or chemotherapy), and you don't want to give them your cold by contaminating the ice with your hand.

There may also be "dunking stations" at the Rest Stop, where you can soak a bandana or hat in cold water. Do what you want, but I would suggest you pour some cold water from your water bottle onto your bandana or hat, and not dunk it into a container filled with water that other people have put their sweaty hats and bandanas into. I'm not usually a fanatic about this sort of thing, but just think about it for a second.

The only beverages at Rest Stops and at Lunch are water and sports drink (the brand will vary from year to year, and from event to event). If you absolutely need a soft drink or coffee during the day, feel free to stop at a store along the Route and buy one. And if you happen to be on a Walk with me, and you bring me a Diet Pepsi, you will earn my eternal gratitude, a huge hug, and maybe an extra pack of chocolate chip cookies!

There are usually soft drinks, coffee and tea at dinner. At breakfast, there will be orange juice, coffee, tea and hot chocolate. If, like me, you drink diet soda with breakfast (ok, we all have our little idiosyncrasies), you will need to stash one in your tent the night before, and then bring it with you to breakfast.

Hyponatremia

You have to drink both water and sports drink. While it is theoretically possible to drink too much sports drink, I've never heard of it happening. And the worst case would be an upset stomach. On the other hand, if you drink too much water and not enough sports drink, you are at risk of hyponatremia.

Hyponatremia is a serious medical condition that occurs when you lose electrolytes as you sweat, but you don't replace them. And while pretzels and chips may replace the sodium (from the salt), they won't replace the magnesium, the potassium or other vital electrolytes in your blood. If you keep drinking water, and sweating out your electrolytes, you risk diluting your blood (literally), and screwing up your electrolyte balance. You'll start with a headache, then nausea, diarrhea, vomiting and eventually seizures and a coma. Fun stuff, huh?



I'm pretty low key about most things, but this is not one of them. Don't mess around with this. I don't care that you found magic jelly beans that contain electrolytes. I don't care that your cousin's next door neighbor is a nurse, and said it was okay to only drink water as long as you eat pretzels. I don't care that your father-in-law is a retired proctologist, and said "all that sports drink stuff is a bunch of hooey." And I don't care if you don't like the taste of sports drink.

Unless you have consulted a physician who specializes in sports medicine, do not take a risk. Each year, people are pulled off the Route, and despite all their training and hard work at fund raising, they end up spending the day in the Emergency Department with an IV. Don't let it be you this year. If you don't like the taste of sports drink, dilute it. Or think of it as medicine, and just drink some of it straight while holding your nose. If you only like a particular brand and flavor of sports drink (perhaps the lemon/lime flavor of an organic vegan brand manufactured by Buddhist monks in the foothills of Himalayas☺) bring the powder with you and mix your own. But drink the damn sports drink. Any questions?

In Camp



On each Walk, there will be some “private” showers, where someone can undress and shower in complete privacy. In contrast, most of the shower trucks are “semi-private”, where you might have a small curtained area in which you can undress and then dress again, or even a group changing area. Traditionally, the “private” showers are reserved for breast cancer survivors who may be uncomfortable with the idea of undressing in front of others as a result of their surgery. Out of respect, please be considerate and leave the “private” showers for those who really need them.

There will be a Medical tent in camp, staffed by licensed and highly qualified physicians and nurses, as well as other health care specialists. There is often a long line of people waiting to see them. If you take good care of yourself during the day, and visit the Medical tents along the Route to treat minor issues, you reduce the chance that you’ll need to wait on a long line at Camp to treat what is now a major issue.

Do not try to “hide” from the Medical crew. Many people worry that a relatively minor case of dehydration will cause them to be removed from the Walk by the medical crew. Instead of getting help when they can be easily treated, they wait until 2 AM, when they are now in serious trouble, and almost guaranteed to end up in the hospital with an IV. The Medical crew is there to help, and they will only prevent you from walking when it would be a serious risk to you to do so. To avoid this, follow proper hydration, nutrition and stretching practices, and seek help before little problems become big problems.

More Tent Stuff

It can be hard getting out of a toasty sleeping bag in your tent in the morning, especially if it was a cool night (and even 50 degrees will feel downright cold after sleeping in a warm sleeping bag). And putting on clothing that was in your gear all night and that also cooled down to a brisk 50 degrees or so is not particularly fun!

An old camping trick is to put the zip lock bag (with your clothing for the morning) in the bottom of your sleeping bag when you go to sleep. It will warm up to your body temperature overnight, and will be a lot more comfortable to put on in the morning. And if you've gotten the air out of the bag before you sealed it, your clothing won't even be wrinkled in the morning (or at least not any more wrinkled than it already was in the bag).

If you wear a knit hat to bed (e.g. a ski cap), it will keep you **much** warmer while you sleep, since you tend to lose a lot of heat from your head. And no one but your tent mate will ever know. This is particularly helpful if you don’t have much hair on your head.

Wear layers, e.g. a short sleeve shirt, then a long sleeve shirt, then a sweatshirt or fleece. Your body heat gets trapped between the layers, and helps insulate you from the cold.

Wear warm socks while you are sleeping. If your feet are cold, then the rest of you will feel cold.

Pick up a chemical heat-pack at the drugstore (typically used for muscle soreness) or a camping store. You can use it in your sleeping bag on a cold night to stay nice and toasty.



Interlude

Porta-potty Etiquette

For Men:

- Do not bring in anything to read. First, you don't really want to spend extra time inside. Second, there is likely to be a long line of uncomfortable women waiting outside. If they see you exit the Porta-potty carrying a newspaper, we can't guarantee your safety
- Make sure to lift the seat, and aim carefully while standing. Your wife or girlfriend may tolerate sitting on a wet seat, because you are otherwise a really wonderful guy. The thousands of other women on your Walk are not likely to think you are so wonderful.
- Put the seat down when you are done. Whether or not you do this at home, you absolutely need to do it now.
- If you forget to put the seat down, do not plan to linger. Run like hell!!!!



For Women:

- It is not a phone booth. Do not use your time inside to call your family. First, no matter how much they love you, they don't want you to be thinking of them at a time like this. Second, if you happen to drop the phone inside, it is gone forever. I promise you that there is no amount of charm or crying that will convince a crew member to get it for you.
- You should be drinking enormous quantities of water and sports drink, and as a result, you will have to pee almost constantly. Since you may normally pee almost constantly, you may not notice a difference. We realize that the Porta-potty is not the most pleasant environment, but that is no excuse to cut back on your liquid consumption during the Walk.
- At night, if you are properly hydrating, you will undoubtedly have to get up at least once to pee. Please remember not to let the door of the Porta-potty slam shut, waking everyone for miles around.



- Try to remember exactly where your tent is located. At 3 AM, walking up and down the rows of identical blue tents, calling out your friend's name in a loud whisper, is considered tacky.
- When you walk into the Porta-potty, you will notice a small open plastic container attached to the wall. It is not a garbage receptacle. It is not a fanny pack holder. It is a urinal. Now you know.

After The Walk

Keep Hydrating

It is extremely important that you keep drinking both water and the sports drink of your choice for the 2 days (48 hours) after you complete your Walk. While I know it is tempting to think that you are "finished with all that damn stuff" when you get home, your body will still need the extra fluids and electrolytes. It is not unusual for walkers to end up in the Emergency Room of their local hospital on the Monday after their Walk, due to dehydration or even hyponatremia.

Please re-read the previous paragraph. You'll notice that I mentioned drinking a lot of water and sports drink, and did not mention beer, wine, margaritas or martinis. While I know it is tempting, it is not a good idea to drink alcohol immediately after the Walk. While a little champagne or a couple of sips of wine are ok to celebrate, you are asking for trouble if you drink much more than that. While some people will be able to tolerate alcohol with no problem, for many people (especially those who didn't properly hydrate during the

Walk), they are going to find that consuming any appreciable amount of alcohol after the Walk will actually increase their dehydration (and the resulting headaches and nausea). Skip the alcohol on Sunday, and double-up on the water and sports drink instead.

One easy way to tell if you are properly hydrated after the Walk is whether or not you wake up in the middle of the night, at home, to pee. Think of your body as a sponge. If it is “dried out”, it will soak up any liquid you add, but if it is fully saturated, any extra liquid you add won’t be able to be absorbed. If you aren’t getting up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, your body is still “dried out” and needs more liquid (water and sports drink). By the way, as long as you are up in the middle of the night, drink another glass of water or sports drink.

It’s a Walk, not a Diet

You will not lose weight during your Walk. I realize that this is not what you were hoping to hear, but I thought I’d mention it anyway.

I like to think of the Walk as the world’s longest buffet line. You will probably be eating non-stop, from the time you wake up until the time you brush your teeth and go to sleep. The food is good, though it is intentionally **not** low-calorie. You need to consume plenty of calories, as you’ll be burning plenty of calories. You will also be drinking massive quantities of liquid. If you thought you retained water in the past, you ain’t seen nothing yet! It is not unusual to weigh 3 pounds **more** on the morning after your Walk you did on the day before your Walk began. If you are expecting that you will lose weight, think again. The good news is that the weight you gained will disappear in a couple of days, as you get back to your normal routine.



The most important thing to remember is that you absolutely must eat and drink. Trying to limit your food and liquid consumption during the Walk is a guaranteed recipe for medical problems. Besides, you’ll be building up quite an appetite on the Walk, which will make the food taste especially good. And if you are lucky enough to have the “peanut butter and jelly graham crackers” at a Rest Stop, you **have** to try them!

Homework



When we were kids, and we didn't finish a lesson in class, we would get assigned the remaining part of the lesson as homework. As I see it, the Walk doesn't end at Closing Ceremonies. Closing Ceremonies are just a step in our journey. For all of us, there is some homework now that we are back in the "real world."

- The next time we see someone in trouble, who needs someone's help, walk towards them, don't walk away. That's our homework.
- The next time we see someone who is in pain, who needs someone to listen, walk towards them, don't walk away. That's our homework.
- And the next time we are tired, and miserable, and don't know if we can take another step, take it anyway. That's our final exam.

Next Steps

For a few days, we come together on the Walk to create a better world, a world where no one is ignored or overlooked; where everyone is cherished and included.

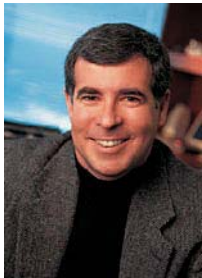
And then we go back to “the real world”, to our homes, and our jobs, and our families. Remember to hydrate. Remember to stretch. And please remember that now you have to flush!

Back in the “real world”, you may notice some differences. People may not be lined up to cheer for you as you go to lunch, or as you walk down the street. You may not run into people who have breasts decorating their hats, or their clothing, or their vehicles. And people may not thank you every day, or tell you how magnificent you are. In fact, you may never hear it.



I want you to remember something, no matter how many miles you walked. You **are** extraordinary. You **do** matter. You **make** a difference. Remember this, in the days and months after the Walk, when the kids pull at you, or your boss criticizes you, or your spouse seems insensitive.

When you find yourself feeling far away from the emotion you felt at the Closing Ceremonies, remember that what made the Walk special wasn't the walking, or the tents, or the porta-potties. What made those few days special comes from within you. It is who you are, and who you choose to be. The Walk didn't make you special; it simply gave you a place to show how special you already are.



Our journey doesn't end at Closing Ceremonies; it is simply another step along the path. The challenge is to try to make each day, a special day. To live our lives so that each day is full of kindness and compassion, and a tribute to the memory of those we have lost and to the lives of those who have survived.

I look forward to our paths crossing again in the future.

Larry

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There is one other person to whom I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Dan Pallotta is a dreamer, a visionary, and a pioneer, in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson and John F. Kennedy, and in the tradition of Helen Keller and Mother Theresa. Dan exemplifies the words of Gandhi, “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

Due to his inspiration and pioneering work, hundreds of millions of dollars have been raised over the years to fight AIDS and Breast Cancer, and to provide support for those in our communities who battle with these terrible diseases. As a result of Dan's tremendous efforts to make a difference in the world, hundreds of thousands of people who have participated in these events have learned a simple message:

Humankind. Be Both.