

on your feet

Best foot forward

Team sports, ball skills, lycra shorts and gym subscriptions not on your agenda? Then discover the benefits of walking. **Arveen Bajaj** stretches her legs.

Useful websites

www.go4awalk.com

www.ramblers.org.uk

www.countryside.gov.uk

Busy at the surgery, busy home life ... where to fit in that all important exercise window to keep yourself healthy, happy and fit? For those who just can't bear running on the treadmill like a human hamster, or who find the pace of energetic aerobics classes just a little too much, walking for recreation and wellbeing just might be the answer.

Besides taking in the great outdoors, you are likely to be among like-minded people in a rambling or walking group. The Ramblers' Association is Britain's biggest charity working to promote walking and to improve conditions for all walkers. It has 143,000 members in England, Scotland and Wales and actively campaigns to increase and protect public access to the countryside for recreational enjoyment.

The association has done a significant amount of work on the Freedom to Roam campaign. The work carried out led to a new legal right — or right to roam — provided by The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW), and applies only to mapped areas

of uncultivated, open countryside, namely mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land. Many local regional and county based routes can be found on their website, so a good walking route is probably nearer to your home than you think, even in the large towns and cities in the UK.

Another organisation that is promoting walking as a healthy way to exercise is the Walking the way to Health Initiative (WHI), set up by the Countryside Agency and the British Heart Foundation.

The WHI aims to get more people walking in their own communities, especially those who take little exercise or live in areas of poor health. The organisation offers information, support and encouragement to complete beginners, existing walkers and health and leisure professionals.

Walking can also be a family activity, and many parents who take their children out on hikes are often surprised at how much they enjoy it, despite the kids moaning at having to leave behind their video games for a couple of hours. Start pounding those pavements and pastures — you'll soon reap the benefits.