



Telephone: 01963 31842
Email: info@balsamcentre.org.uk



Balsam Centre Health Walks January – March 2026

What is a Balsam Centre Health Walk?

Health Walks promote walking as an achievable, non-competitive and enjoyable way to improve health and increase physical activity. There are a variety of walks to accommodate absolute beginners to the more experienced. They are a great way to increase your fitness levels, enjoy local natural spaces and meet new people. The walks are all free of charge, but donations are welcome. Walks are led by volunteers who are trained Health Walk Leaders.

Which walk is right for me?

There are different types of Health Walks to accommodate a range of walking experiences and fitness levels.



The Amble – from/to River Cale Cafe @ 10am, Thursdays

The Amble is a slow-paced, short walk (under 30 minutes) on level, stable ground, making it ideal if you haven't done much walking before, or perhaps don't get out of the house that often. With plenty of benches along the way, you can stop as often as you need to.

Starting Point: River Cale Cafe, Wincanton, BA9 9ED. Grid ref: ST708283



Short Walk – from/to the Balsam Centre @ 10am, Tuesday

These 1-hour walks aim to maintain or increase general fitness. The walk follows pavements, paths and tracks around Wincanton and the surrounding fields and will include some inclines. There is no need to book for these walks and can be geared to the walkers who turn up. These walks happen every Tuesday, starting and ending at the Balsam Centre, usually finishing with a cup of tea or coffee in the Centre.

Starting Point: The Balsam Centre, Wincanton, BA9 9PA. Grid ref: ST715285



Stourhead Buggy Walks @ 10am, Thursdays Spring to Autumn

Buggy & Toddler Walks run every other Thursday, meeting at 9:30am for a prompt 10am start from the Visitors Centre at Stourhead. This is a lovely walk around the beautiful gardens, suitable for buggies and babies in slings.

Entry is free for every adult with a child - extra adults will have to pay the garden entry fee or be National Trust members, (car parking is now also free).

There is no need to book, but all walkers will need to register and collect a pass at The Balsam Centre before the first walk, passes will only be issued to people living within a 10 mile radius of The Balsam Centre, so please take a proof of address with you to register. The walks last about 45 minutes, with the option of ending in the National Trust Cafe if you wish.

Meet outside Stourhead Visitors Centre at 9:30am. Postcode BA12 6QF.

Grid ref: ST778339

Long Walks - start location and day will vary each week

Information for these walks are in this brochure, and we request that you please book for these walks by emailing info@balsamcentre.org.uk. Use the What3Words app to find the start location. These walks are graded by number of boots:

	fairly level walk of no more than 3 miles
	walks of approximately 2 hours and may include steps, inclines, uneven paths and sometimes stiles
	More challenging walk of over 5 miles and could include terrain as for 2 boots

No walk in the week starting 5th January.

Wednesday 14th January – 10am



Leaders: Lorraine and Hilary

Shaftesbury. 2 options for this walk depending on the weather: - Option 1: if the ground is very wet, then the walk will be on pavements and footpaths around Shaftesbury, with great views from Park Walk and down Gold Hill. 5 miles. Option 2: around the north of Shaftesbury, mainly on footpaths to Middle Combe. The walk will be decided closer to the time.

Meet: Barton Hill car park, postcode SP7 9QA.

What 3 words location: ///clogging.denote.lemons

Friday 23rd January – 10am



Leaders: Chris and Pamela

Somerton. A 4 mile walk all on tarmac along quite country lanes, with NO muddy footpaths/fields or styles. There is one decline and one incline, neither of which are serious. There are 2 cafes in town, if anyone wants a coffee afterwards.

Meet: Somerton Library (TA11 7PR) – large free (2-3 hours) car park around the library.

What3Words location: ///gently.luxury.bins.

Friday 30th January - 10am



Leaders: Mark B

Bulbarrow Hill from Ansty. A circular walk from Lower Ansty up through Hilton and onto Bulbarrow Hill (trig point at 274m). The walk is approx. 6.3 miles and will take 3.5 hours – Mark suggests you bring a flask and snacks. Ansty is approx. 45 min drive from Wincanton.

Meet: Fox Inn car park. Nearest postcode: DT2 7PN.

What3Words://shielding.adhesive.solutions.

Wednesday 4th February - 10am



Leader: Lorraine and Hilary

Fonthill Bishop. A walk on footpaths and quiet lanes to Hindon and return through Berwick St Leonard

Meet: The River Barn, Fonthill Bishop. Nearest postcode SP3 5SF.

What3words: ///theory.advantage.stormy.

Tuesday 10th February - 10am



Leader: Peter

Quarr Nature Reserve, Sherborne. A country walk through the nature reserve and the area. Approx. 5 miles.

Meet: The entrance to the nature reserve. Park on the street. Nearest postcode: DT9 4JD. What3Words: /// conqueror.misted.pranced

Thursday 19th February - 10am



Leaders: Annette and Lu

Cold Kitchen Hill, Kingston Deverill. Starting from Kingston Deverill. One hill to climb at the beginning and then a gentle walk over and meandering round the hill back to Kingston Deverill. Mainly on chalk so less mud. Great views at the top. 4 miles.

Meet: On the road just past the turning to King Alfred's Close. Ample parking on the side of the road.

What3Words = shaped.detonated.defrost

Thursday 26th February - 10am



Leaders: Mark H and Chris

Rolls Bridge, Gillingham to Milton, returning vial Wyke and Common Mead. The route is mainly level with no hills or stiles. 4.6 miles.

Parking by Gillingham Town Cemetery What3words ///writings,endlessly.responds

Meet: At the start of the footpath on Rolls Bridge Way.

What3words ///leaned.atlas.composts.

Tuesday 3rd March - 10am



Leader: Peter

Fiddleford Manor. A ramble over the riverside meadows to Stur and return via Broadoak and Piddles Wood. 1 stile, some inclines. 4.5 miles.

Meet: Fiddleford Manor car park (free).

What3Words: /// harshest.cleans.unzipped. Nearest postcode DT102BX.

Thursday 12th March - 10am



Leader: Tony

Walk to be confirmed.

Wednesday 18th March - 10am



Leaders: Lorraine and Hilary

Walk details to be confirmed.

Meet: Ashmore Village Hall, nearest postcode: SP5 5AQ

What3words:/// zoos.entry.quaking (coming off the road into a private drive, then turn right onto the lane that leads to the village hall - there is a charge of £1 per car)

Friday 27th March



Leaders: Mark B

Dorsetshire Gap and Higher Hill from Ansty. A circular walk from Lower Ansty up Nordon Hill, across the Dorsetshire Gap and on to Higher Hill (Trig Point at 244m). Route is 6.6 miles and will take approx. 3 to 3.5 hrs – Mark suggests you bring a flask and some snacks. Ansty is approx. 45 min drive from Wincanton.

Meeting: Meet at 10am at the Fox Inn car park post code DT2 7PN.

What3Words: ///shielding.adhesive.solutions.

Thursday 2nd April



Leaders: Annette and Lu

East Knoyle. A lovely walk through the village, past Christopher Wren's birthplace, and on paths through woods. Some inclines – great view from the top of the hill.

4.1 miles.

Meeting: Meet and park at the village hall car park – it usually has a box to leave a donation for the parking. Nearest postcode: SP3 6AE.

What3Words: ///tribe.showcases.reduce (what3words has the village hall marked in the wrong place, so use the 3 words to get the exact spot or use Googlemaps).

The list of walks can also be found on our website <https://www.balsamcentre.org.uk/health-walks> and further updates are posted on our Facebook group

How do I join a Walk?

If you would like to participate in any of the Health Walks please complete a registration form before attending your first walk - you can do this by either dropping into the Centre and complete a registration form or completing the form online.

Once you have registered, you can join any walk in the brochure. **Booking is required for “Long” walks**, though not for our other walks. Walks of any length may be cancelled in exceptional circumstances or weather conditions and those who have booked to attend a long walk will be contacted. If in doubt, please contact the Centre.

We advise that you take part in walks appropriate for your health and fitness levels. If you have not participated in much exercise recently or are worried about your health, please consult your doctor before taking part or increasing your physical activity levels.

A waterproof coat, removable layers and supportive, waterproof footwear is recommended, along with a bottle of water.

A parent or guardian must supervise any children under the age of 16. If you wish to bring a young child, please phone and book your place as some walks may not be suitable for the very young.

Regrettably dogs are not allowed on the walks.



Follow us on Facebook

If you are on Facebook join our “Balsam Walking Group”, which is a private group where you can share your photos and thoughts about our walks. We hope to update this group if there are any conditions you may need to know about for a particular walk.

Interested in becoming a walk leader?

We are in need of new walk leaders and back-markers. If the idea appeals, we provide free training. For details, telephone Izzie 01963 31842 or email info@balsamcentre.org.uk

Why walk?

It's widely acknowledged that walking from A to B is better for the environment and air quality in our towns and villages than using our diesel and petrol powered cars.

Walking is undeniably good for us too. It may:

- improve your mood
- reduce **stress**
- manage **anxiety**
- help you sleep better
- increase your energy
- help you to cope with difficult times
- improve your confidence and self-esteem
- reduce the risk of **depression**

These points are explored in further detail on:

<https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/walking-health>

There is a fantastic video on YouTube called “**23 and ½ hours: What is the single best thing we can do for our health**” - watch it here - <https://youtu.be/aUalnS6HIGo>

A *morning walk* specifically may have many potential benefits. “**Just one thing**” by Dr Michael Moseley first aired on BBC Radio 4 in March 2021. In the April 10th episode he explores why an **Early Morning Walk** is beneficial to our health, and on May 15th why **Green Spaces** could benefit your brain and body. The episodes are available on BBC Sounds App or

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p09by3yy/episodes/player?page=1>

And there’s always NHS guidance:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/walking-for-health/>

Any cited sources of information are given in good faith and are a small representation of what is available. The Balsam Centre is not advocating a particular viewpoint and individual judgement should be used when accessing such information.

Have you considered using walking poles..?

There are several reasons to use walking poles when out walking or trekking. Walking poles help you move across terrain quicker, provide additional support and reduce the amount of effort required thus allowing you to achieve more during your walks.

When used correctly walking poles can significantly increase your pace which has additional health benefits. Walking poles improve posture, especially important if you are carrying a load. For more tips about walking poles:

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/walk-magazine/reviews/2012/september/walking-poles-buyers-guide.aspx>

**A BIG thanks to our volunteers –
without you, this wouldn’t be possible!**

The Balsam Centre,
Balsam Park,
Wincanton,
Somerset.
BA9 9HB
Tel: 01963 31842

**Email: info@balsamcentre.org.uk
Registered Charity Number 1080719**

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