

Positive steps to better health

Though its health benefits are pretty well-known, walking is still an underrated form of exercise. Regular walking has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic illnesses like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, asthma, stroke and even some cancers. In fact, it's one of the easiest ways to get more active, lose weight and become healthier.

When you walk with a purpose, however – connecting with the world around you and discovering some of its secrets – you can add a whole new dimension to the experience. Walking can then be as much about mental wellbeing as it is about physical health.

That's something the Trust's Pathology Director, Professor Jonathan Berg, understands. In his free time, Jonathan organises the Positively Birmingham Walking Tours of Birmingham city centre. As well as providing an opportunity for some fresh-air exercise, the tours stimulate walkers' imaginations as they take in the historical context of the city, its canals, its industrial pioneers and the Victorian heritage they see around them.



The walkers meet 'The Golden Boys' – Boulton, Watt and Murdoch scheming in Centenary Square

Jonathan describes the tours, which are inspired by his successful photobooks of Birmingham, as “One citizen's view of the city you can experience today”.

He told Heartbeat: “While I'm excited about helping people understand and explore the city, I'm also keenly aware of the physical health benefits of walking. A tour covers around 3 kilometres in 1 ¾ hours – and for some of the participants this is clearly a decent stretch!”

The walking tours are held at weekends and Wednesday afternoons. Some Birmingham employers are already starting to include them in their staff inductions for new recruits. The tours are also raising awareness and contributing to Sifa Fireside, a Digbeth based charity working on issues of homelessness around the city.

To find out more about the tours, visit www.positivelybirmingham.co.uk.



Professor Berg with a tour group outside Baskerville House in Birmingham