



Walking and Health

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Abstract: Walking is the most popular physical activity among adults, and it's easy to see why. It requires no special clothes or equipment, and it's free. Regular walking can have many health benefits. It may lower your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes. It can strengthen your bones and muscles. It may help you maintain a healthy weight. It might also help lift your mood. Make walking fun by going to places you enjoy, like a shopping center or park. Bring along someone to chat with, or listen to some of your favorite music (but keep the volume low enough to hear the sounds around you). Think about safety as you plan when and where to walk. Walk with others when possible, and take a phone and ID with you. Let someone know your walking time and route. If it's dark outside, wear a reflective vest or brightly colored clothing. And always be aware of your surroundings.

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Introduction:

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Make walking fun by going to places you enjoy, like a shopping center or park. Bring along someone to chat with, or listen to some of your favorite music (but keep the volume low enough to hear the sounds around you). Think about safety as you plan when and where to walk. Walk with others when possible, and take a phone and ID with you. Let someone know your walking time and route. If it's dark outside, wear a reflective vest or brightly colored clothing. And always be aware of your surroundings.

Benefits of Walking:

“Walking is the most studied form of exercise, and multiple studies have proven that it’s the best thing we can do to improve our overall health, and increase our longevity and functional years,” says Robert Sallis, M.D., a family physician and sports medicine doctor with Kaiser Permanente.

Last year, the 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee presented its scientific report to the Department of Health and Human Services, noting that walking is the most popular aerobic activity and has one of the lowest injury rates of any form of exercise. Here, we explain what walking can do for you—and how to maximize its many benefits.

The Benefits of Walking:

1. Lower body mass index (BMI). A study from the University of Warwick published in 2017 in the *International Journal of Obesity* confirms that those who walk more and sit less have lower BMIs, which is one indicator of obesity. In the study, those who took 15,000 or more steps per day tended to have BMIs in the normal, healthy range.
2. Lower blood pressure and cholesterol. The National Walkers’ Health study found that regular walking was linked to a 7 percent reduced risk of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
3. Lower fasting blood sugar (glucose). Higher blood glucose levels are a risk factor for diabetes, and the National Walkers’ Health Study also found that walkers had a 12 percent lower risk of type 2 diabetes.
4. Better memory and cognitive function. A clinical trial of older adults in Japan published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* in 2015 found that after 12 weeks, men and women in a prescribed daily walking exercise group had significantly greater improvements in memory and executive function (the ability to pay focused attention, to switch among various tasks, and to hold multiple items in working memory) compared with those in a control group who were told just to carry on with their usual daily routine.
5. And a study of 299 adults, published in the journal *Neurology* in 2010, found that walking was associated with a greater volume of gray matter in the brain, a measure of brain health.
6. Lower stress and improved mood. Like other types of aerobic exercise, walking—especially out in nature—stimulates the production of neurotransmitters in the brain (such as endorphins) that help improve your mental state.
7. Longer life. In a review of studies published in 2014 in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, researchers found that walking for roughly

three hours a week was associated with an 11 percent reduced risk of premature death compared with those who did little or no activity.

And it's never too late to reap the benefits of walking: A small 2013 study in the journal *Maturitas* found that seniors with an average age of 80 who walked just four times a week were much less likely to die over the study's 10-year follow-up period compared with those who walked less.

Walking for Health:

Experts agree that any amount of walking is good for you, but to get the maximum benefits of walking, you need to log some mileage and increase your intensity.

The minimum prescription for good health is 30 minutes of moderate intensity walking, five days per week. “More is better, but you can get a significant portion of the health benefits of walking even with just that moderate amount,” Sallis says.

Here are five research-backed ways to sneak more steps into every day—as well as get the most out of every step you take.

Walk as much as you can. The University of Warwick study compared people with at least one sign of metabolic syndrome—a group of risk factors (high blood pressure, fat around the waist, high blood sugar, and high triglycerides and cholesterol) for heart disease—to those with no risk factors. They found that those who got the least activity had the most risk factors, and those who walked the most—accumulating at least 15,000 steps per day—had healthy BMIs, smaller waists, lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and better blood sugar control. Many people aim for a daily goal of 10,000 steps (or about 5 miles)—and an industry of fitness tracking devices has emerged to support them—but that magic number didn't originate from scientific research, says John Schuna Jr., Ph.D., assistant professor of kinesiology at Oregon State College of Public Health. “It was first used in a Japanese marketing effort associated with one of the first commercial pedometers.” The device was called “manpo-kei,” which literally means “10,000 steps meter” in Japanese.

“The 10,000 steps goal is thought to be a realistic minimum, and it's good, but for complete risk reduction, people should aim for more,” says William Tigbe, M.D., Ph.D., a physician and public health researcher at University of Warwick and lead author of the study showing that 15,000 steps per day can lead to greater benefits. “In our study, those who took 5,000 extra steps had no metabolic syndrome risk factors at all.”

Pick up the pace. Another way to get more out of even a shorter walk is to do it faster. A study published in 2017 in the journal *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* looked at not

just the total number of steps people took per day but also how quickly they took them.

“Those who had a faster stepping rate had similar health outcomes—lower BMI and lower waist circumference—as those who took the most steps per day,” says Schuna, one of the study authors. He recommends trying for a minimum of 100 steps per minute (roughly 2.5 to 3 miles per hour) or as brisk a pace as you can (135 steps per minute will get you up to about a 4 mph pace).

Break it up. “We cannot accumulate 15,000 steps in leisure time only,” reasons Tigbe. “But if you take walking breaks throughout the day, it is doable.” Aim for brisk walking bouts of 10 minutes or more at a time. You’ll get in more steps and decrease the amount of time you spend being sedentary—which is a big risk factor for heart disease. Try intervals. Instead of doing an entire 30-minute walk at the same moderate pace, try high-intensity interval training (HIIT). Alternate between 30-second to 1-minute bursts of faster walking, followed by a minute or two of slower-paced recovery.

In one study researchers compared people who did no exercise with those who walked at a steady, moderate pace and those who mixed high and moderate intensity. The researchers found that the group that cranked up the intensity had the greatest reductions in waist circumference and abdominal fat. Take it uphill. “Think of it as getting two for one,” says Sallis. “When you increase your intensity, such as walking up a steep hill, you get the equivalent benefit in half the time.” In an ongoing study exploring walking for health across the adult lifespan, University of Massachusetts Amherst kinesiology researchers found that walking cadence is a reliable measure of exercise intensity and set simple steps-per-minute guidelines for moderate and vigorous intensity.

Summary:

Walking comes very natural to us and it comes with health benefits that not only improves vigor and vitality but also helps in resisting many diseases like metabolic syndrome, diabetes etc Walks that are short must be strenuous in nature to receive the benefits in little time.

One of the benefits of walking is it improves mood and relieves stress that we encounter in our daily life. Also it has been suggested that one must walk 15,000 steps in a day to receive the maximum benefits of walking.

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