

Walking: Your best step to a healthier heart

April 11 2022



When the world gets you down, go for a walk and make your heart happy.

Physical activity is one of the best ways to [manage stress and boost your mood](#), while reducing your risk for [heart disease and stroke](#), according to the American Heart Association (AHA).

The AHA recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week—or about 30 minutes a day, five days a week. And the minutes don't have to be consecutive to bring benefits.

"[Walking](#) is a great way to improve your health and your mental outlook, and it doesn't take a lot of expensive sporting equipment to do it. Put on a good pair of shoes and grab a [water bottle](#) and you're ready to go," said Donna Arnett, a past president of the AHA and a dean at the University of Kentucky College of Public Health, in Lexington.

"It doesn't matter how fast or how far you walk, the important thing is to get moving," Arnett said in an AHA news release. "Counting [steps](#) doesn't have

to be part of a structured exercise program.

Increasing your everyday activity, like parking slightly further from your destination, doing some extra housework or yardwork and even walking your dog can all add up to more steps and better health."

The association pointed to research presented at a 2021 AHA conference and published online in *JAMA Network Open*.

The researchers found that people who took more steps in short spurts lived longer—even if they weren't doing long, uninterrupted workouts.

Benefits leveled off at about 4,500 steps a day in short spurts.

Compared to no daily steps, each day that someone increased steps by 1,000 was associated with a 28% decrease in death during the study period. Those who took more than 2,000 uninterrupted steps a day had a 32% decrease in death during that time.

Compared to people with the fewest steps, [middle-aged people](#) who got in the most each day had a 43% lower risk of diabetes and a 31% lower risk of high blood pressure, the researchers reported.

For women in the study, those who had the highest step count also were 61% less likely to be obese compared to women who walked the least. For each 1,000-step interval increase, women had a 13% lower risk of obesity.

Individuals who walked at least 7,000 steps per day had a 50% to 70% lower risk dying during the study period compared to those who didn't. Walking more than 10,000 steps was even better, lowering the risk of premature death from any cause among Black and white middle-aged men and women.

While being outdoors in areas that have a lot of green may also have [health benefits](#), walking anywhere, including indoors at home, in a gym or at

the mall can all offer benefits, Arnett said.

"Unfortunately, many people do not have access to safe walking trails or adequate green space," she said, adding that AHA advocates for policy changes that make it easier for people to have access to safe places to walk, exercise and play, as well as transportation options that integrate walking, bicycling and wheelchair use.

"The easier it is for people to engage in [physical activity](#) in all aspects of their daily life, the more likely we are to achieve healthier, longer lives for everyone," Arnett said.

More information: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has more [tips for a healthy heart](#).

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APA citation: Walking: Your best step to a healthier heart (2022, April 11) retrieved 10 December 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-healthier-heart.html>

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