

# Walk Away From Death

## Small increase in daily activity can have a big impact

*We all know that exercise and physical activity are good for our health. But can we quantify this? How much activity do we actually need? What are the benefits of more physical activity and what is the threshold to gain these benefits? This article examines the relationship between physical activity and mortality and gives us an idea of how much exercise we need, and how adding as little as 10 minutes a day can make a big difference in our potential risk of death.*



### Abstract

Previous studies suggest that a substantial number of deaths could be prevented annually by increasing population levels of physical activity.<sup>1-3</sup> However, previous estimates have relied on convenience samples,<sup>2,3</sup> used self-reported physical activity data,<sup>1-3</sup> and assumed relatively large increases in activity levels (eg, more than 30 minutes per day).<sup>1-3</sup> The potential public health benefit of changing daily physical activity by a manageable amount is not yet known. In this study, we used accelerometer measurements (1) to examine the association of physical activity and mortality in a population-based sample of US adults and (2) to estimate the number of deaths prevented annually with modest increases in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity intensity (MVPA).

*Current guidelines for physical activity recommend “for substantial health benefits adults should do at least 150 minutes to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity spread out throughout the week”. While this makes sense it doesn’t let us know how much benefit we will get if we increase our physical activity. This is an interesting study because it quantifies the increase in activity and correlates with the death rate. They used a group of subjects between the ages of 40-85 years and used 0-19 minutes of exercise daily as a baseline. They found that increasing exercise to 20-39 minutes daily decreased the risk of death by 31%. Increasing to 40-59 minutes decreased risk by 49%. Sixty to 79 minutes decreased risk by 60% and 80-99 minutes decreased risk by 68%. Overall, adding 10 minutes of exercise daily lowered risk of death overall by 6.9%, while adding 20 to 30 minutes daily decreased risk 13%-16.9% respectively. The researchers estimated that 111,174 deaths/year could be prevented in the United States by adding 10 minutes of physical activity daily and this would increase to 272,297 with daily addition of 30 minutes of physical activity. We could potentially prevent between 3-9% of the annual deaths in the United States if people were more active for just 10-30 minutes daily. While this is a population-based study, I think it is clear that we should all strive for even small increments of increased activity in our daily lives. Ten minutes could make big difference!*

Saint-Maurice PF, Graubard BI, Troiano RP, et al. Estimated Number of Deaths Prevented Through Increased Physical Activity Among US Adults. *JAMA Intern Med*. Published online January 24, 2022. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2021.7755.