



Healthy Lifestyle

Fitness

When you're counting your daily steps, are 10,000 enough for you — or maybe too many? Learn how walking can help improve your health and how to set the right goal.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

You've just gotten a new activity tracker and you're ready to aim for 10,000 steps a day. But is that an appropriate goal for you? It all depends on your present fitness level and what you want to accomplish.

The average American walks 3,000 to 4,000 steps a day, or roughly 1.5 to 2 miles. It's a good idea to find out how many steps a day you walk now, as your own baseline. Then you can work up toward the goal of 10,000 steps by aiming to add 1,000 extra steps a day every two weeks.

If you're already walking more than 10,000 steps a day, or if you're fairly active and trying to lose weight, you'll probably want to set your daily step goal higher.

Why set a daily step goal? Walking is a form of exercise that's available to most people. You don't need any special equipment other than some supportive walking shoes. And there's no need for an expensive membership at a fitness center.

Yet walking for regular activity can help reduce your risk of these common health problems:

- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Depression

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity exercise, such as brisk walking. But you don't have to jump feet-first into the 150-minute goal. Start where you are and gradually increase your activity week by week.

Those 150 minutes a week can be divided in many different ways. Some people aim for 30 minutes of exercise five days a week. Others fit in 10 minutes of exercise several times a day.

If your walking pace isn't speedy enough to qualify as moderate-intensity exercise, those steps still help prevent the problems that can occur from sitting too much during the day. Adding any regular activity to your routine is beneficial.

Once you've determined your goals, try these ideas for fitting more walking into your routine:

- **Take the dog for a walk.** If you don't have a dog, volunteer to walk dogs at an animal shelter. Or combine your activity with social time by joining a friend to walk his or her dog.
- **Try music.** A bouncy tune or something with a strong beat can make activity more enjoyable and help motivate you to walk farther or faster.
- **Include the family.** Instead of an afternoon movie, go for a walk or hike together.
- **Go in person.** Instead of sending a work email, walk to your colleague's desk.
- **Walk while waiting.** Take a walk instead of sitting when you're early for an appointment or waiting for a flight.
- **Schedule workday walks.** Put reminders in your calendar for short walking breaks to ramp up your energy throughout the day. Have a one-on-one meeting? Plan to walk and talk.
- **Park farther away.** Choose parking spots farther away from the entrance. If you take the bus, get off a stop early and walk the rest of the way.
- **Take the stairs.** Even going down the stairs counts as steps and burns calories.

How far will you go today? Your goal will depend on your starting point. But nearly everyone can reap the benefits of walking more, step by step.

Show References

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