

Walking Leads to Longer Life, Better Outcomes

By [Amy Lynn Fletcher](#), Blue Zones website

Logging more steps per day as a systematic approach to health has an intuitive appeal, especially in light of the obesity epidemic in the United States. Though the fitness industry is [worth an estimated \\$35 billion per year](#), approximately 41.9 percent of the population is classified as obese. Obesity contributes to stroke, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes, among other serious conditions, and consumes an [estimated \\$173 billion in annual medical costs](#).

Scientific research clearly shows that regular physical activity leads to better health. [One recent cohort study](#), for example, found that approximately 110,000 deaths per year could be prevented if adults aged 40-85 increased moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) by ten minutes per day. What we did not have until recently is scientific evidence to support the claim that logging 10,000 steps per day improves individual health outcomes.

What does the peer-reviewed evidence suggest?

Despite its ubiquity in the health sector, the 10,000 steps per day idea actually originated in a 1965 Japanese marketing campaign. For fifty years, few scientists bothered to evaluate the claims made about daily step regimens, leading to a gap in peer-reviewed research.

However, a team of researchers affiliated with The Steps for Health Collaborative recently published [a meta-analysis of 15 studies](#) in Lancet Public Health that assesses the approach. The results confirm that while the conventional wisdom needs an upgrade, logging daily steps can be a practical tool in the fight against obesity.

Daily steps, health outcomes, and age

For people who struggle to lose weight or to fit exercise into a busy schedule, walking 10,000 steps per day is a manageable goal. This is one reason its popularity soared. For those of us who loathe gyms, have bad memories of high school physical fitness classes, or have neither the time nor money for a gym subscription, upping the number of steps we take each day is an accessible way to weave exercise into a daily routine.

However, the Lancet research finds that 10,000 steps is not a magic number. The effect of daily steps varies significantly with age. Within a total sample of 47,451 participants across 15 studies conducted in multiple countries, the scientists found that while taking more steps per day correlates with progressively lower mortality

risk, the risk reduction for adults aged 60 and older plateaus at 6000 – 8000 steps per day. Those younger than 60 see comparable risk benefits in the range of 8000 – 10,000 steps per day.

Why the evidence about daily steps matters

Because the Lancet study is based on observational data, the authors do not attribute causation and note that further research is necessary. However, the findings strongly suggest that a daily step regimen correlates with better health and strengthen the evidence base for physician advice to patients.

The results also suggest that older adults may need fewer steps to experience positive health outcomes and lowered mortality risk. Older adults are more likely to experience mobility problems or other barriers to exercise. Lowering the recommended number of steps per day could help to improve motivation to exercise among those individuals for whom 10,000 daily steps seems overwhelming.

Blue Zones believes that [our bodies were built to move](#). Whether one logs 6,000, 8000, or 10,000 steps (or more) per day, increasing your daily step count is an effective way to improve individual health and enhance the overall health of the community.