

Step into Spring! Walking for health

With warmer weather arriving, many of us are looking to get outside and walk more. More than 2,400 years ago, Hippocrates, a physician in ancient Greece, said walking is man's best medicine.

But how much walking do we need for good health? In the 1960s, Japanese researchers estimated that 10,000 steps were needed. They developed the technology of the pedometer called Manpo-kei.¹ They found that the average person took 6,000 steps in a day. To be healthy, they needed to add 4,000 more steps -- thus 10,000 steps.

Over the years, researchers have been trying to find out if that really is the optimal number of steps for good health. A recent review of all the research on walking and health looked at walking in relation to death by any cause ('all-cause mortality').² Taking more steps a day was indeed linked to a lower risk of all-cause mortality.

How many steps are optimal for seniors?

The research review confirmed that the optimal number of steps for adults was 8000–10 000, but that older adults can get benefits with less than that. To lower risk of mortality in older adults, about 6000–8000 steps a day were optimal. The research also concluded that using the simple measure of counting steps is a valid way to know if you are doing enough for good health.

Step into Spring and put a spring in your step?

So now we know to aim for 6000-8000 steps per day. Does it matter how quickly we take those steps? Does intensity or speed matter? Some research suggests, yes – it does matter. A large study found that those over the age of 50 who reported walking at a fairly brisk or fast pace had a greater reduction in risk of death from any cause, including cardiovascular disease.³ The research also suggested

that walking more briskly was important if you are not able to walk as frequently. The same holds true if you have to shorten the length of your walks.

There are benefits to walking no matter where you do it: at the mall, on a treadmill, outside on the sidewalk, or on a park path. Modern research supports what physicians like Hippocrates observed so long ago!

References

1. Catrine Tudor-Locke PhD. Manpo-Kei: The Art and Science of Step Counting. Trafford Publishing. 2006.
2. Paluch et al. Daily steps and all-cause mortality: a meta-analysis of 15 international cohorts. *Lancet Public Health*; 7: e219–28. 2022.
3. Stamatakis, E. et al. Self-rated walking pace and all-cause, cardiovascular disease and cancer mortality: individual participant pooled analysis of 50,225 walkers from 11 population British cohorts. *52(12):761-768*. 2018.

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