

How Far Should You Walk to Improve Your Health?

You Won't Like the Answer.

Walking 10,000 steps a day is one of those mysteriously decided good things we should all do, much like drinking eight glasses of water a day. I read it comes from a [Japanese marketing campaign in the 1960s](#). I'd like to report the number of steps needed for full benefit was fewer, but a fair amount of research has since been done on the subject, and it found that walking 10,000 steps a day is [great for your health](#).

Evan Brittain, a cardiologist and associate professor at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Tennessee, co-wrote an October 2022 study published in [Nature Medicine journal](#) that measured how much exercise people actually got using Fitbit fitness trackers during a median of four years.

The study looked for associations between step count and disease. *"We looked across every human disease that showed up in unbiased analysis," Brittain says. "We homed in on six strongly: obesity, hypertension, diabetes, esophageal reflux, sleep apnea and depression."*

The study found the biggest protections against most diseases among those who walked **close to 10,000 steps a day**. For example, the research found that increasing your step count to 10,000 from 6,000 **reduces the incidence of diabetes by 56%**.

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Why is walking — or any form of exercise, really — so good for us? A few reasons, says cardiologist Chad Raymond, director of cardiac rehabilitation at University Hospitals Harrington Heart and Vascular Institute in Ohio. For starters, those same endorphins that make you feel great after exercising also open up your blood vessels and help create new blood vessels.

"Regular exercise reduces blood pressure five to eight points, often what most blood pressure medicines do," he says.

Exercise also improves the ability of skeletal muscles ability to extract oxygen from the blood, Raymond adds. And it helps improve lung function, which in turn helps the heart.

Stop the presses: Being a couch potato isn't good for you. **So put on those comfortable shoes and go for a walk.**