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How Much You Need To Walk Every Day To Cut Your Risk Of Heart Disease

Data suggests there's a certain number of minutes you should aim for to improve your cardiovascular health. Here's how you can sneak them in.

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Walking is a powerful tool for both our physical and mental health — perhaps even more powerful than we think.

Walking an estimated 21 minutes a day can reduce your risk of heart disease by 30%, according to a Harvard Health special report published in 2017 that has been used often to underscore the importance of going for a walk. The report also suggests that walking has been “shown to reduce the risk of diabetes and cancer, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and keep you mentally sharp.”

In other words, walking has serious health benefits, along with being a free workout that doesn't require any equipment or much planning.

If that information alone doesn't convince you to hit the pavement, here are a few other reasons to embrace walking and some advice on how to incorporate more of it into your day.

No matter your age or health history, walking is beneficial.

“Walking consistently is a great form of exercise that reduces cardiovascular mortality ... and often correlates to other healthy habits and behaviors,” said Dr. Tamanna Singh, co-director of the sports cardiology center at Cleveland Clinic.

And, while walking isn't associated with the same kind of energy exertion as spin classes or interval runs, it's just as valuable and can help people of all ages and health backgrounds better their health outcomes.

“Anyone can benefit from walking,” Singh said. People who have minimal or no cardiovascular risk can prevent disease, while those who deal with things like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes or obesity can use walking to reach their health goals and prevent future strokes or heart attacks, she added.

In fact, walking is so good for so many different things, the Harvard Health report stated that “the next time you have a medical check-up, don't be surprised if your doctor hands you a prescription to walk.”



Approximately 21 minutes may be the magic number, but short walking bursts each day are beneficial, too.

Walking keeps you from prolonged sitting.

Working from your living room, your kitchen or your office may have its perks (no commuting!) but there are also some disadvantages. Many of us are sitting more than ever because of the current work-from-home lifestyle, and sitting all day can affect our bodies over time.

“It’s not so much that chairs are evil and sitting is really bad for you,” Harvard evolutionary biology professor Dan Lieberman previously told HuffPost. “It’s that sitting too much is bad for you if you don’t also exercise.”

Singh noted that walking in any capacity keeps you from prolonged sitting, which can only be a health benefit in the long run.

If you need motivation, try walking with a friend.

Singh said that going for a walk with friends is a great way to create accountability for both you and your walking buddies. Think about it: You’re more likely to lace up your sneakers if your friend is heading over to meet you for a walk you agreed to earlier in the week.

“You’ll each hold each other accountable to developing a walking habit and sticking to it,” Singh said.

And you don’t have to task your friend group with high-stress, quick-paced walks. As long as you get out there, you’re benefiting your body. Plus, if you’re someone who likes to walk and talk, you’ll get some enjoyable conversation and laughter out of a walk with a friend, Singh noted.

You can also listen to music or a podcast on your walk.

If you are more of a solo exerciser, Singh suggested that you save a good podcast, audiobook or soundtrack for your walks to make them more enjoyable.

Try telling yourself that you can only listen to these things during your walks.

“It’ll get you excited to go on a walk, and [you’ll] get the ‘reward’ of listening to your favorite thing,” Singh said.



If you can't fit in the full 21 minutes a day, that's OK.

Between work, errands, family obligations and household chores, life is busy. Taking time for yourself may not be feasible right now and that's OK. If you can't fit in the recommended 21 minutes of walking a day, start small.

“Even a quick one-minute jaunt pays off,” according to the report by Harvard Health. The report noted that a 2014 study from the University of

Utah found that “for every minute of brisk walking that women did throughout the day, they lowered their risk of obesity by 5%.”

So start small. Task yourself with a minute-long walk down your driveway this afternoon, or take that 10-minute work check-in call as you walk around your block. No amount of time is too short.

Once you feel ready, you can start to incorporate different walking distances and intensities, like speed changes and hills, Singh said. Both of these things, plus “maintaining a consistent habit will likely yield the biggest bang for its buck,” she explained.