

15 Minutes of Walking (at This Walking Pace) Adds Years to Your Life, Study Says

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New research suggests that the pace you walk can lower your risk of early death, improve heart health, and potentially extend your lifespan.

Walking has always been a cornerstone of healthy aging. But new research shows that *how you walk* may matter more than how long.

Walking has always been the low-hanging fruit of exercise. No equipment, no membership, no excuses, just you and your feet. Research backs it up: logging around 8,000 steps a day can **lower your risk of dying from all of the major diseases**. Pile on decades of studies showing it lowers blood pressure, steadies blood sugar, and even lifts your mood. No wonder the American Heart Association and World Health Organization keep telling us to “just walk.” It’s the original **longevity** hack.

Now, researchers are suggesting that *how you walk* may matter more than how long.

A recent study published in *Annals of Epidemiology* followed nearly 80,000 adults across 12 southern U.S. states for more than 16 years. Researchers wanted to know: does walking pace affect longevity? The findings were striking:

- **Fast walking just 15 minutes a day lowered the risk of early death by nearly 20%.**
- Slow walking for hours showed little benefit, only about a 4% risk reduction.
- The greatest protection was against cardiovascular deaths, particularly heart attack and stroke.
- The benefits were strongest among those with existing health conditions, though everyone gained.

Why Walking Pace Matters for Longevity

Brisk walking challenges the cardiovascular system in ways casual strolling does not. It improves blood flow, strengthens the heart's efficiency, and regulates blood pressure and glucose. Even if you never set foot in a gym, moving at a faster clip rewires your physiology toward **resilience**.

Even more compelling: the benefits of fast walking worked *independently* of other exercise. Whether or not participants lifted weights or went jogging, the daily brisk walk still delivered protection.

Why Accessibility Matters

What makes these findings remarkable is *who* was studied. More than half of the people reported incomes below \$15,000 a year, and nearly two-thirds were Black. These are communities often left out of longevity research and often facing the steepest health risks.

“Brisk walking offers a convenient, accessible, and low-impact activity that individuals of all ages and fitness levels can use to improve general health and cardiovascular health specifically,” says study author **Wei Zheng**, MD, PhD, MPH, the Anne Potter Wilson Professor of Medicine and director of the Vanderbilt Epidemiology Center.

The fact that something as simple as brisk walking can meaningfully extend life is powerful. It shows that longevity science isn't just for the few with resources. It's for everyone with a sidewalk, a safe block, or even a hallway to walk through.

Here's How to Walk at the Pace That Extends Healthspan

- **Find your “brisk” pace:** It's the pace that makes conversation a little harder but still possible. If you're tracking, aim for 50–70% of your max heart rate.
- **Start with 15 minutes.** The study showed benefits at that threshold. Work toward 30 minutes if you can.
- **Layer it into your day.** Power walk between meetings, take stairs two at a time, or speed up evening strolls.
- **If fast isn't possible, go long.** Slow walking for an hour or more still showed benefits for heart health, especially ischemic heart disease.

Longevity isn't reserved for those with access to cutting-edge treatments or boutique fitness studios.

Sometimes it's as simple as how you move through your day. Fast walking, even for 15 minutes, can shift your physiology toward resilience and longevity.

Your assignment for the week? Choose one walk and speed it up. Not a marathon, not even a mile. Just a daily practice of moving with intention. Your heart, and your future self, will thank you.

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