

This Japanese Walking Method Quietly Improves Your Biological Age

6 MIN READ

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BY GREG PRESTO

Backed by science and built for midlife, this simple fast-slow walking routine boosts VO2 Max without logging thousands of steps. Here's how to do it.

Here's a "one weird trick" that actually works: Just changing up your pace while walking can reduce your biological age by giving your aerobic capacity a big boost. It's only a *little* harder than regular walking, but you'll reap anti-aging benefits in less time.

The "trick" is a fast-then-slow-then-fast-again interval method that's recently been dubbed "Japanese walking," and has been all over the net in recent months ... but the protocol itself isn't exactly recent. It's based on **a 2007 study (by Japanese scientists) from the *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*.**

But this 18-year old walking method has some potentially big benefits for Super Agers. Japanese walking specifically boosts VO2 Max, a key marker for healthy longevity. Here's a quick primer on how to try this viral method, and a little detail on its benefits, and a couple of caveats to keep in mind.

Japanese Walking: How to Do It

In the study, scientists divided two groups of men and women in their 50s and 60s into two groups: The first group walked for 8,000 steps per day at an easy pace, around

half of the max pace they could walk. The second group did what would eventually be known as the “Japanese walking” method:

1. Three minutes at 40 percent of max pace.
2. Three minutes at 70 percent of max pace.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 at least 5 times in a row.

Easy enough. If you do five sets of slow and fast, the whole thing takes 30 minutes. The trick, of course, is to figure out those 40 and 70 percent numbers.

One easy method is to do a test on a treadmill: Hop on, and start bumping up the machine’s velocity. See how fast you can go before you have to break from a walk into a jog—there’s your max speed. Multiply it by .7 and .4, and you’ve got your interval speeds.

If you’d rather walk outside or around a track, use the treadmill test to determine your max as a number of steps per minute. Find your max walking speed in your treadmill test, then set a timer for 30 seconds. During that 30 seconds, count your steps. Multiply it by two to get your max steps per minute, use that as a base for your 70 and 40 percent thresholds.

For example, if your max walking pace nets you 90 steps in 30 seconds, your max pace is 180 steps per minute. Your 7/10 pace is 126 steps per minute, and your 4/10 pace is 72 steps per minute.

To get the benefits of Japanese walking described in the study, use your numbers to do 5 or more intervals four or more times per week.

The Benefits of the Japanese Walking Method

When participants in the 2007 study went for walks of this kind four times per week

for five months, they gained more muscular strength than the group that went for moderate-paced walks, and improved their systolic blood pressure—dropping that top number by an average of 10 points for men, and 8 points for women, compared to decreases of just 1 or 2 points for those who walked at a moderate pace.

The most notable benefit for Super Agers, though, was improvements in their aerobic capacity, or **VO2 Max**. It's a measure of the maximum amount of oxygen your body can deliver to your muscles to keep them working, and it's a key indicator of fitness that's tied to longevity. In a VO2 Max study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that followed 120,000 people for more than 8 years, people were divided into four groups based on their aerobic capacity. People in the lowest VO2 Max group (the “low” group) were about twice as likely to die during the course of the study as those in the second-lowest group (“below average”). And the “above average” group (group 3 of 4) were even better off: The “low” group were 2.75 times more likely to die.

In the Japanese walking study, men who did the interval protocol improved their peak aerobic capacity by an average of 10.86 percent over five months (2.9 mL/kg/min on average). Women boosted their VO2 Max by 7.4 percent (2 mL/kg/min).

These increases equate to big bumps in healthy longevity: The men in the Japanese walking group moved themselves from the lowest quartile of the *JAMA* study's results to the high end of the below average” group. The women jumped from the bottom end of the “below average” group to the top.

To simplify it even further, a 2018 study that tracked **5,000 men** for 46 years found that for every increase in VO2 Max by 1 unit (measured as mL/kg/min), the study participants added 45 days to their lives. For the men in the Japanese walking study, doing this walking protocol for about 150 days added 130 days to their lives. If we use the same metric for the women, those who Japanese walked added 90 days to their

lives.

Potential Drawbacks of this Walking Method

The Japanese walking method saves time, and it's even kind of fun—paying attention to my pace and varying it has been engaging when I've tried it on afternoon walks. But there are some potential drawbacks to keep in mind.

1. There's no indication if the people in the study exercised before.

Exercise studies often indicate whether the participants have previously exercised (“well-trained individuals”) or not (“untrained” or “sedentary”). The results can be different: As you might expect, untrained or sedentary people often see much bigger gains when they start exercising compared to when experienced exercisers do something new.

This study doesn't indicate whether the participants were previously active. So if you're already active, the benefits of this protocol may not be as pronounced.

2. It's probably not enough steps on its own.

Thirty minutes of Japanese walking will probably only clock in around 3,000 steps. In the 180 steps/minute example from above, you'd do 2,970 steps in a five-round session.

While “10,000 steps” is an old marketing gimmick that's run amok, there are proven longevity benefits to getting 8,000: A **2023 study from the University of Granada** found that 8K is the sweet spot for cheating all-cause mortality, or early death. Another **Japanese study** found that older people who took more than 7,972 steps per day were less likely to die over the period studied than those who took fewer than 4,503 steps per day.

So a five-round burst of Japanese walking alone won't get you there. Try getting more

activity in to hit 8,000.

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WRITTEN BY:



Greg Presto