

# Taking more steps daily may lead to a longer life

21 May 2021, by Karen Astle



Woman walking with grandchildren. Credit: American Heart Association 2020

"Technological advances made in recent decades have allowed researchers to measure short spurts of activity. Whereas, in the past we were limited to only measuring activities people could recall on a questionnaire," said lead study author Christopher C. Moore, M.S., a Ph.D. student in epidemiology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "With the help of wearable devices, more research is indicating that any type of movement is better than remaining sedentary."

From 2011-2015, 16,732 [women](#) wore a waist step counter that measured their daily steps and walking patterns for four to seven days. The women were all over age 60 (average age of 72; mostly non-Hispanic white women) and were participants in the Women's Health Study, a large, national study of heart disease, cancer and other long-term disease prevention.

Taking more steps per day, either all at once or in shorter spurts, may help you live longer, according to preliminary research to be presented at the American Heart Association's [Epidemiology, Prevention, Lifestyle & Cardiometabolic Health Conference 2021](#). The meeting is virtual, May 20-21, and offers the latest science on population-based health and wellness and implications for lifestyle.

Walking is one of the safest and easiest ways to improve fitness and health including heart health. The American Heart Association's fitness guidelines for adults recommend at least 150 minutes per week of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity, or a combination of both. Popular fitness apps and [step counters](#) make it easy to count steps, so researchers used a wearable step counting device to compare the effects of uninterrupted bouts of steps (10 minutes or longer) to occasional short spurts, such as climbing the stairs and general daily activities throughout the day.

The researchers divided the total number of steps for each study participant into two groups: 1) 10 minutes or longer bouts of walking with few interruptions; and 2) short spurts of walking during regular daily activities such as housework, taking the stairs, or walking to or from a car. In follow-up, they tracked deaths from any cause for an average of six years, through December 31, 2019.

Researchers found:

- Overall, 804 deaths occurred during the entire study period of 2011-2019.
- Study participants who took more steps in short spurts lived longer, regardless of how many steps they had in longer, uninterrupted bouts. The benefits leveled off at about 4,500 steps per day in short spurts.
- Compared to no daily steps, each initial increase of 1,000 steps per day was associated with a 28 percent decrease in death during the follow-up period.
- A 32 percent decrease in death was noted in participants who took more than 2,000

steps daily in uninterrupted bouts.

A prior analysis of the same women reported that those who took 4,500 steps per day had a significantly lower risk of death compared to the least active women. "Our current results indicate that this finding holds even for women who did not engage in any uninterrupted bouts of walking. Taking 2,000 or more additional steps during bouts was associated with further benefits for longevity," Moore said.

"Older adults face many barriers to participating in structured exercise programs, so some may find it more convenient and enjoyable to increase everyday walking behaviors, like parking slightly further from their destination or doing some extra housework or yardwork," Moore said.

Since all study participants were older and mostly non-Hispanic white women, more research is needed to determine if the results apply to men, younger women and people from diverse racial and ethnic groups.

Provided by American Heart Association

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