

Script – Print – Take steps for better health

After months of winter, the urge to get outside is hard to ignore, and for many people, that starts with a simple walk.

That includes [Paige Linstead](#), a physician assistant with OSF HealthCare. “A lot of patients have sedentary jobs, as do I,” Linstead says. “So, I try to walk on my lunch, walk my dogs when I get home. I really focus on the calorie aspect of it too, and try to increase the walking speed, the distance that you can cover.”

For years, the targeted goal was 10,000 steps, which originated in the 1960s from a marketing campaign to promote the Tokyo Olympics. While the American Heart Association still recommends 10,000 steps a day, the organization says that just a mile of walking can also provide health benefits.

But now, the prevailing thought is that 7,000 steps a day will still do the trick. Walking improves your cardiac health, lowers your risk for diabetes, improves your circulation, can help improve sleep, decreases appetite and helps with weight management. It’s also enough steps to reduce the risk of dementia, cancer and depression.

“So, 10,000 was the gold standard. It’s an easy number for people to say they’re going to reach,” says Linstead. “But 7,000 is sufficient for most adults. It’s a good goal to help minimize health risks and improve your health.”

It’s especially good for older adults.

Walking is good for heart health

According to a [study](#) published in the journal *Circulation*, older adults who walk three to four miles a day - 6,000 to 9,000 steps - are 40% to 50% less likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke than those who walk a mile (2,000 steps) a day.

This study focused on cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk and the findings were the result of eight studies using data from 20,000 people in the United States and 42 other countries. Their average age was 63 with 52% being women.

“It can improve your cardiovascular health, decrease your risk for diabetes or diabetes progression, help with stability, mobility,” Linstead adds. “It can help with mental health, getting a little bit vitamin D with the sun. Just set small goals for yourself and keep increasing as you can until you can get to that goal of 7,000 steps in a day.”

But if that still seems like a lot, don’t worry. Linstead says the important thing is to get started and work your way up gradually. Start by walking around your block or maybe visiting the local shopping mall.

“Absolutely, any movement is good movement,” she says. “Instead of having a sedentary lifestyle, if you can only get a couple thousand steps in a day, that can help elderly with mobility, stability, mental health, too.”

The Centers for Disease Control encourages people to get in 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise each week. But Linstead says don’t try to squeeze in all 30 minutes at once, at least to start. She recommends breaking up the time into different parts of your day – for example, 10 minutes in the morning, 10 at lunch and another 10 minutes at night might just be the best route to take.

“I think that would be good motivation for people if they had a partner or a group to walk with,” Linstead says. “And you can walk at whatever speed you’re comfortable with, the distance that you’re comfortable with, but knowing that you have a support system in place.” Before starting any type of walking program, however, make sure to consult with your medical provider first.