

Script – Print – Every Step Counts

It's no secret that walking is good for you. In fact, medical experts say it's better than running. Walking improves fitness, reduces pain, eases depression and fatigue, and helps with circulation and posture, and more.

It's especially good for older adults.

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.

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.

For people 60 and older, the more steps taken, the lower their risk for CVD. The study found no connection between steps taken and the risk of CVD in younger adults.

"Heart health or cardiovascular risk increases as we age," says Nancy Dagefoerde, a nurse practitioner with OSF Cardiovascular Institute. "So, if a person is sedentary, they're adding to that risk, and it's also important for balance and movement in general and just overall health and reduction of health problems. That's why it is especially important for older people."

If 6,000 steps still seem like a lot, don't worry. Dagefoerde says the important thing is to get started and work your way up gradually.

"If you start at 2,000, and you just start adding on 1,000 steps, you're showing health benefit, which I think is really important because many people can't do that many steps in a day for several reasons," says Dagefoerde.

You can choose between a slow walk and a brisker pace. Dagefoerde says the benefit of walking slowly is it burns more calories and is easier on the joints. Brisk walking helps fight developing heart disease, cancer and dementia.

And if walking isn't your thing, don't sweat it. Dagefoerde recommends other exercises that are just as helpful including water programs, dance classes, chair exercises, using a recumbent bike or try walking in place indoors.

"During an hour-long TV show, there's 20 minutes of commercials, and they're three to four minutes at a time," says Dagefoerde. "So, if you can't do a lot of walking at once, get up and walk for those three-to-four-minute intervals, then you're getting some activity in."

The bottom line is to get moving. Start by having a conversation with your doctor about the best way to begin any type of walking program.

"Do small amounts. It doesn't have to be a great deal," says Dagefoerde. "Many people think if they can't do a half hour or 45 minutes at once, they might as well not exercise, but you can actually break it up into three 15-minute workouts or three 15-minute walks. Even if you're working, you can take a 15-minute break and do a little now and a little more later. Something is better than nothing."

For more information about leading a healthier lifestyle, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).