

One Easy Exercise With 31 Proven Health and Fitness Benefits

By **JESS BARRON**



What if I told you there's an exercise that has more than 31 major benefits including everything from lowering your body fat percentage to toning your abs, decreasing lower back pain and reducing your risk of heart attack and stroke?

With so many Americans concerned about the cost of health care, this exercise can positively impact eight out of the 10 most costly health conditions in the U.S. (Heart disease, cancer, COPD, asthma, diabetes, osteoporosis, arthritis and back problems.)

This exercise will also improve your mood, boost endorphins, reduce fatigue and lower your stress hormones as well.

What's more, this exercise is absolutely free and and you don't need a lot of time: Only 15-40 minutes a day five days a week will tone and trim your body, vastly improve your health and could even save your life.



Some of you have probably guessed that I'm talking about walking!

How Americans Compare to Other Nations

In a study published in October 2010 in the journal "Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise," researchers used pedometers to track the steps of 1,136 American adults. They found that people living in the U.S. take fewer steps than adults in Australia, Switzerland and Japan.

* Australians averaged 9,695 steps a day.

* Swiss averaged 9,650, steps a day.

* Japanese averaged 7,168 steps a day.

* Americans averaged just 5,117 steps a day.

According to the CDC, [36 percent of Americans are obese](#), while a [2010 Reuters article](#) states that “During the past decade Australia, Japan and Switzerland have reported obesity rates of 16 percent, 3 percent and 8 percent, respectively.”

And it’s not just lower obesity rates; it’s longer life expectancy as well. As [A 2013 CNN article](#) reported, [2011 data shows that 27 countries](#) (including those daily walkers in Australia, Switzerland and Japan!) have higher life expectancies at birth than the United States.

QUESTION:
WHAT EXERCISE HAS MORE THAN 12 PROVEN HEALTH BENEFITS?

- IMPROVES MOOD
- IMPROVES SLEEP QUALITY
- LOWERS BLOOD PRESSURE BY 5 POINTS
- DECREASES KNEE PAIN
- ENGAGES & TONES AB MUSCLES
- DECREASES THE ODDS OF CATCHING A COLD BY 30-50%
- REDUCES SIGNIFICANTLY THE RISK OF DEVELOPING TYPE 2 DIABETES
- DECREASES BODY WEIGHT, BODY FAT PERCENTAGE & WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE
- INCREASES THE SIZE OF BRAIN, IMPROVES MEMORY & CUTS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE RISK BY 50% OVER 5 YRS
- HELPS PREVENT ARTHRITIS, BUILDS BONE MASS & REDUCES RISK OF OSTEOPOROSIS

ANSWER: WALKING
WHICH COUNTRIES WALK THE MOST?

- AUSTRALIA: AVERAGE 9,695 STEPS A DAY
- SWITZERLAND: AVERAGE 9,650, STEPS A DAY
- JAPAN: AVERAGE 7,168 STEPS A DAY
- UNITED STATES: AVERAGE 5,117 STEPS A DAY.

Here Are 31 of the Proven Health Benefits of Walking:

- * It increases mood-enhancing neurotransmitters and reduces the stress hormone cortisol, helping you feel less anxious or sad.
- * Can lead to a longer life. Research by the University of Michigan Medical School and the Veterans Administration Ann Arbor Healthcare System says those who exercise regularly in their fifties and sixties are 35 percent less likely to die over the next eight years than their non-walking counterparts.
- * Decreases knee pain and stiffness by keeping joints lubricated.
- * Lowers the risk of fractures. A Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, study of post-menopausal women found that 30 minutes of walking each day reduced their risk of hip fractures by 40 percent.
- * Reduces women's risk of stroke by 20 percent when they walk 30 minutes a day - by 40 percent when they step up the pace — according to researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston.
- * Boosts endorphins, lowering stress, fatigue and anger in 10 minutes and lowers blood pressure by five points.
- * Reduces glaucoma risk by reducing the pressure inside the eye, which lowers your chance of developing glaucoma, [according to the Arthritis Foundation](#).
- * May cut Alzheimer's disease risk by 50 percent over five years, and for women, reduce colon cancer risk by 31 percent.
- * Decreases the odds of catching a cold by 30-50 percent.
- * Tones ab muscles, builds bone mass and reduces risk of osteoporosis and reduces low back pain by 40 percent.
- * 54 percent lower risk of heart attack with two to four hours of fast walking per week.
- * 30-40 percent less risk of coronary heart disease with three hours of brisk walking per week.
- * 54 percent lower death rates for type 2 diabetics who walk three to four hours per week.
- * Helps prevent and manage arthritis.

In its report on “[The benefits of regular walking for health, well-being and the environment](#),” (I highly recommend you read [the full report!](#)) the British charity C3 Collaborating for Health mentions that walking:

- * Decreases body weight, BMI, body fat percentage and waist circumference and increases muscle endurance.
- * Increases HDL ("good") cholesterol.
- * Significantly reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.
- * Increases heart and respiratory fitness in adults with type 2 diabetes.
- * Reduces physical symptoms of anxiety associated with minor stress.

* Improves sleep quality and is associated with better cognitive performance.

* Increases the size of the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, potentially beneficial for memory. (Check out [the study on this one.](#))



How to Get Started

At work, go outside during your lunch break and walk for 15-40 minutes for four or five days a week. Ask your co-workers to take walking meetings.

At home, make walking your catch-up time with your family. My husband and I try to always walk our dogs together for 15-20 minutes every night.

Every 10 minutes more you walk at a decent pace is about 1,000 more steps or more. Get yourself [a pedometer](#), [map your route on LIVESTRONG's Loops](#), or download a free mobile app such as [Every Body Walk!](#), [RunKeeper](#), [Strava](#) (which I use) or [MapMyWalk](#). Every 2,000 steps (or approximately 20 minutes) will be about one mile. Every mile you walk will burn 65-120 calories, depending on your bodyweight. Here's [more info on how to convert your mileage and pedometer steps into calories](#).

What Do I Need?

It's a great idea to invest in a pair of supportive shoes designed primarily for walking. Cross-training and running shoes are *not* designed for walking. As [The Walking Site points out](#), "A walker's foot hits heel first and then rolls gradually from heel-to-toe. So, you will need a flexible sole and more bend in the toe than a runner. You should be able to twist and bend the toe area."

Two brands of walking shoes that I have tried and found to be very comfortable include [Prospects](#) (which come in cool colors too) and [Asics](#) (if you prefer more neutral colors).



These are the Prospects Power Walk 604s I walk in regularly

<http://www.livestrong.com/blog/an-easy-exercise-with-23-health-and-fitness-benefits/#ixzz46qNCJ3IR>