

# Live Longer - Take the Stairs

Look around you and we all see the prevalence of obesity and what it is doing to us physically, mentally and to our health insurance. It is now more incumbent than ever that we take upon ourselves personal responsibility, if we want to live a longer and healthier life.

Before we get to this story, I know that not everybody has mobility but trust me, the more you move, the more mobility you will have. One of the things I do is force myself to walk as much as possible. The 10,000 steps per day is a minimum to **maintain** for me. For example, yesterday I had to go to the Meijer store in Grand Ledge, so I make sure I park at the far end of the parking lot, and I know I will get at least a couple of thousands of steps in between walking to and from the store as well as walking inside. Every little bit helps.

If you want to boost your heart health and potentially live longer, consider the stairs. A new study from the UK reveals that regularly climbing stairs can significantly reduce your risk of death from heart disease and other causes.

Researchers analyzed data from over 480,000 people across nine studies. They found that those who frequently climbed stairs had a 39% lower risk of dying from heart disease and a 24% lower risk of dying from any cause. Regular stair-climbers also faced lower risks of heart attacks, strokes, and heart failure. When my right knee gives trouble, I wrap it tight which adds stability and allows me to proceed without the pain.

## Key Findings:

- **Heart Health:** Regular stair-climbers show improved heart health, with reduced risks of heart disease, heart attacks, and strokes.
- **General Health:** Climbing stairs is linked to lower cholesterol and a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes.
- **Quick Benefits:** Health improvements from stair-climbing can begin in just four weeks.

## Expert Insights:

- **Exercise Variety:** "Brief bursts of exercise throughout the day can still have beneficial health impacts," says study author Sophie Paddock from the University of East Anglia.
- **Stamina and Strength:** Cardiologist Suzanne Steinbaum emphasizes that regular movement, including taking stairs, improves heart health and physical stamina.
- **Muscle and Balance:** Climbing stairs builds muscle mass, reduces fat, lowers osteoporosis risk, and enhances balance, notes Tamara Horwich from UCLA.

## Practical Tips:

- **Start Small:** Even a few flights of stairs can make a difference. If you cannot climb all the way, take the elevator partway and walk the rest.

- **Alternative Exercises:** For those unable to climb stairs, other forms of exercise like walking, water workouts, weightlifting, dancing, and tai chi also contribute to longer life and better health.

### **Study Limitations:**

- **Not Definitive:** While the study suggests a strong link between stair-climbing and reduced mortality risk, it does not conclusively prove cause and effect.
- **Other Factors:** Regular stair-climbers might also engage in other healthy habits, like eating well and avoiding smoking, which could influence the results.
- **Accuracy Concerns:** The data relies on self-reported exercise habits, which might not always be accurate.

**Encouraging Activity:** The American Heart Association recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week. Despite the benefits, only about 20% of adults meet these exercise guidelines.

**Final Thoughts:** Regular movement, including simple activities like stair-climbing, plays a crucial role in maintaining heart health and overall well-being. As cardiologist Steinbaum says, "The more we move, the longer we can move in life." So, next time you face a choice between the elevator and the stairs, remember the significant health benefits that come with each step you take.

*Source: personal anecdotes and info from Liz Szabo, an award-winning health writer.*