

# **The Benefits of Brisk Walking**

A Report by Dr. Denise M Dukes

**What is brisk walking?**

**Target heart rate**

**Steps per minute**

**Talk test**

**Benefits**

**Calorie burn**

**How to burn more calories**

**Technique**

**Frequency**

**Bottom line**

A brisk walk is one of the easiest and most effective cardio workouts. And, best of all, you likely already have everything you need to get started.

You can do a brisk, sweat-inducing walk indoors or outdoors and without any special equipment. A good pair

of sneakers is about all you need to start reaping the many rewards of a fast-paced walk.

The key to getting a great workout with brisk walking is to maintain a pace that gives your heart and lungs a challenging workout, but not so hard that you run out of steam too quickly.

Keep reading to find out how to boost your physical and mental well-being with brisk walking as well as the benefits you can reap from this form of exercise.

### **What's considered brisk walking?**

The term “brisk walking” is somewhat vague. Is it a little faster than your normal pace? Is it a lot faster?

To help firm up exactly what it means, there are several ways to measure your pace to make sure you're in the “brisk” zone. Let's take a closer look at three options for gauging whether you're walking at the right pace.

## **1. Target heart rate**

One way to determine if you're walking fast enough is to measure your heart rate.

A safe target heart rate while exercising, for most adults, is 50 to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate.

Exercising at your target heart rate means you're getting the greatest benefit from your workout.

### **According to the American Heart Association**

Your target heart rate during moderate-intensity exercise is around 50 to 70 percent of your maximum heart rate.

Your target heart rate during vigorous activity is about 70 to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate.

So, what exactly is your maximum heart rate, and how do you know what it is?

Your maximum heart rate is 220 beats per minute (bpm) minus your age in years. So, for a 40-year-old person, it'd be  $220 - 40 = 180$  bpm.

**To figure out your target heart rate range, do the following:**

For the low end of your target heart rate, multiply 220 bpm minus your age by 0.50 (50 percent). For example, for a 40-year-old it'd be  $180 \text{ bpm} \times 0.50 = 90 \text{ bpm}$ .

For the high end of your target heart rate, multiply 220 bpm minus your age by 0.85 (85 percent). For example, for a 40-year-old it'd be  $180 \text{ bpm} \times 0.85 = 153 \text{ bpm}$ .

For this person, their target heart rate while walking would be between 90 and 153 beats per minute.

If you're not sure how to measure your heart rate, here's how to do it:

Place the tips of your index and middle fingers on the inside of your left wrist until you can feel a pulse. Don't use your thumb to measure your pulse, as your thumb has a pulse of its own. This could give you an inaccurate reading.

Look at a clock or watch, and count the number of beats you feel with your fingertips for 30 seconds.

Once you have that number, multiply the number by 2 to get your bpm. So, for instance, if you counted 55 beats in 30 seconds, your heart rate would be 110 beats per minute (55 x 2).

To reach your target heart rate zone, aim for the following bpm ranges based on your age:

<b>Age in years</b>	<b>Target bpm</b>
(50–85 percent of maximum)	
20	100–170 bpm
30	95–162 bpm
45	88–149 bpm
50	85–145 bpm
60	80–136 bpm
70	75–128 bpm

## **2. Steps per minute**

Another way to measure your pace is to count your steps.

A study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine suggests that if you can walk at least 100 steps per minute, you're walking fast enough to reap substantial fitness benefits.

Using a fitness tracker can help you keep track of your steps and how fast you're walking.

## **3. The talk test**

A third way of figuring out your walking pace doesn't require any math. Instead, to measure your pace, you start talking while you're walking:

If you can talk comfortably with some breathlessness, you're probably walking at a moderate but brisk pace.

If you can't talk easily because you're out of breath, the pace is probably vigorous.

If you can sing out loud, the pace is likely too slow to be considered a brisk walk. If you can, try to pick up the pace.

### **What are the benefits of brisk walking?**

Regular cardio exercise, like brisk walking, offers a wide range of physical and mental benefits. Some well-researched benefits include:

**Weight loss.** Walking can help you lose excess weight by burning more calories, increasing lean muscle mass, and boosting your mood so you're more likely to keep on walking.

**Improved cardiovascular health.** According to a review of studies, walking 5 days a week can help lower your risk for heart disease. Regular cardio exercise may also help lower the levels of LDL (bad) cholesterol in your blood.

**Lower blood pressure.** Research has found that regular cardio exercise may help lower your blood pressure.

**Lower blood sugar.** Regular brisk walks can increase your insulin sensitivity. This means the cells in your muscles

are better able to use insulin to draw in glucose for energy, both before and after you've exercised.

Improved mental health. Research has also shown that exercise can boost self-esteem, improve sleep, build brain power, and more.

### **How many calories can you burn from brisk walking?**

The rate at which you burn calories depends on several factors, including:

your body weight

your age

your sex

how much lean muscle you have

the intensity at which you work out

how long you work out

To burn a higher number of calories, you'll want to walk at a faster pace. You'll also want to walk for a longer period of time.



For instance, you'll burn more calories if you walk at a pace of 4 miles per hour (mph) for 35 minutes than if you walk at a pace of 3 mph for 20 minutes.

Here's a snapshot of the calories you can burn, depending on your weight and pace, if you walk for 1 hour. Divide this number by 2 to figure out the calorie burn for a 30-minute walk:

<b>Weight</b>	<b>3.0 mph</b>	<b>3.5 mph</b>	<b>4 mph</b>	<b>4.5 mph</b>
130 lbs.	195	224	295	372
155 lbs.	232	267	352	443
180 lbs.	270	311	409	515
205 lbs.	307	354	465	586

### **Ways to boost your calorie burn**

To burn more calories on your walk, try some of these strategies:

## **Walk uphill**

Adding inclines and hills to your walking route will require your heart, lungs, and muscles to work harder and therefore burn more calories.

The advantage of walking on a treadmill is that you can set the incline of your walk. Many treadmills allow you to enter a preprogrammed course of inclines, declines, and flat surface.

## **Add interval training**

High-intensity interval training (HIIT) involves short bursts of vigorous exercise alternated with low-intensity recovery periods.

For example, this could include walking uphill at a fast pace for 5 minutes followed by walking more slowly on flat terrain for 3 minutes, then repeating this pattern for 20 or 30 minutes.

Have shown that HIIT workouts are an effective way of burning calories and reducing body fat in a shorter amount of time.

### **Carry hand weights**

Light weights that don't strain your arms can add extra effort to your walk and make you work a little harder.

### **Technique**

To make the most of your brisk walk, and to avoid injury, try to use the following techniques when walking:

Keep your head up, looking forward, not down.

Relax your neck, shoulders, and back, but don't slouch or lean forward.

Keep your back straight, and engage your abdominal muscles.

Walk with a steady gait, rolling your foot from heel to toe.

Loosely swing your arms, or pump your arms a little with each stride.

If walking outside, don't have headphones or earbuds turned up so loudly you can't hear traffic or someone coming up behind you.

## **Frequency**

The American Heart recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week.

If you follow the recommendation to exercise at a moderate pace for 150 minutes a week, a reasonable goal is to walk briskly for 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week.

If walking for 30 minutes at a time is hard to fit into your schedule, you can break it down into three 10-minute walks or two 15-minute walks a day. It's a good idea to spread activity throughout the week and to walk for at least 10 minutes at a time.

Although 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise is a good goal to shoot for each week, you'll gain even more benefits if you do brisk walking for a longer duration.

### **The bottom line**

Walking at a brisk pace, even for just 10 minutes at a time, can benefit your health and well-being in a multitude of ways.

**Disclaimer:** Please check with your doctor or healthcare provider before starting any exercise routine or nutritional supplements.

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