

10,000 Steps?

The observed current wisdom is that to achieve a good level of cardiovascular fitness we should be achieving 10,000 steps a day. But from where does this number originate? In fact, it was invented by a Japanese pedometer manufacturer in 1965 who named their device Manpo-Kei, literally meaning '10,000 steps meter' and it is likely also to be more than a coincidence that the Japanese character for 10,000 looks like the act of running. Recent comparisons with hunter gatherer lifestyles, suggest that this is a good goal, but is it necessary?

The average person in the US and UK takes 5,000 steps per day and for those with sedentary desk jobs this can be much lower. In comparison with our ancient hunter-gatherer lifestyles, this falls way short of a norm of 2 hours of brisk walking or an estimated 15,000 steps a day. In hunter gatherer communities, such as the Hazda tribe in Tanzania, men and women often live into their 60's and 70's with healthy hearts and no signs of diabetes, yet it is infectious diseases, often curable with Western medicines, that are their biggest threat. These hunter-gatherers use the same amount of energy as adults in EU and US but their bodies have adjusted to burn less energy on other tasks, so physiological processes such as inflammation, fight-or-flight responses and sex hormones are better regulated rather than always being in a permanent active state.

Therefore, the known benefits of exercise are justified: maintenance of a good cardiovascular system, reduction of low-grade inflammation and moderation of hormones levels which reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and improve mental well-being, amongst others. However, contrary to this, extreme exercisers have a slightly higher mortality rate than regular exercisers where the suppressive elements of exercise are manifested in 'overtraining syndrome' leading to reduced immunity and fertility.

Whilst 15,000 steps or 2 hours brisk walking is more in tune with hunter gatherer exercise norms, this is unachievable for most due to restraints on time or physical ability, but any exercise that raises our heart rate reduces our mortality risk. A recent study of older women found that those who managed 4400 steps/day had lower mortality rates 4 years later than those averaging 2700 steps/day, with the benefit plateauing at 7500 steps/day. NHS recommends at least 10 minutes of brisk exercise a day in its Active10 initiative. This is moderate exercise that raises your heart rate, whether it is jogging, a brisk walk with the dog or mowing the lawn, it will provide benefit. If you can do more, then go for it, but keep it fun!

Check out XenoVida's information sheet on How To Reduce Inflammation

https://www.xenovida.com/admin/apps/admin/uploads/documents/blogs/how_to_reduce_inflammation.pdf

(<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/active10/home#ke2jxdbWxxHfv5OH.97>)

<https://www.irunfar.com/2018/12/beyond-fatigue-understanding-overtraining-syndrome.html>

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24232340-300-how-many-steps-a-day-do-you-really-need-spoiler-it-isnt-10000/>

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/article-abstract/2734709>

