

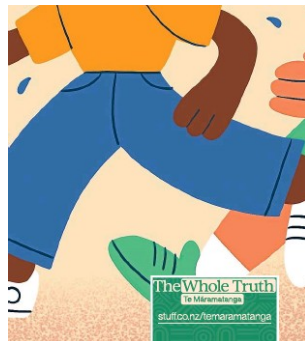
## - Walking / Exercise

# No need to walk 10,000 steps each day

Rather than counting how many steps you take a day, here's what you should be doing for your health instead. By Olivia Shivas.

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Fitbits and other fitness activity trackers often start users with a goal to reach 10,000 steps a day. It's a great motivator to include more physical activity into your day.



But where did this number come from and does it actually make a difference to our health?

According to Fitbit, 10,000 steps a day equates to around 8 kilometres, which is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week.

Data collected in a 2011 study suggests healthy ambulant adults have the ability to take anywhere between 4,000 and 18,000 steps a day. This normative data was collected from various global studies between 1980 and 2011.

Although there are variations in the optimal number of steps to take, a greater number of daily steps was significantly associated with lower all-cause mortality, according to a US study. The study's 4840 participants wore accelerometers for a few days, and those who took more steps per day were associated with significantly lower all-cause mortality, and cardiovascular disease and cancer mortality.

But realistically, an adult's ability to reach a target for a daily step count depends on their health. It's unlikely for an unfit person to reach a 10,000-a-day step count if they struggle to walk around the block.

Professor Rob Doughty, a clinical cardiologist at Auckland City Hospital, said the number of steps you take a day doesn't really matter, but instead people should adjust the time they are sedentary, or inactive, during the day and be physically active instead.

"For someone who is very sedentary and you set them up with a target of 10,000 steps a day, you're kind of setting them up probably to fail," said Doughty. "For some people, it will appear unachievable so they won't even try to do it."

Rather than counting how many steps you take a day, we should be participating in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise for at least five days a week, he said.

Moderate-intensity exercise means that you can keep it going for 30 minutes, "you'll be puffing a little bit and your heart rate will go up, but you're not exhausted at the end". Alternatives to walking might include gardening, water aerobics, swimming or dancing.

"It's all about behaviour change, it's about modifying our behaviour in a normal day to become more active," said Doughty.

Reporting disclosure statement: This story was written with expert advice from Professor Rob Doughty, a clinical cardiologist at Auckland City Hospital. It was reviewed by The Whole Truth: Te Māramatanga expert panel member Associate Professor Lisa Te Morenga.