

# Japanese Walking: This Gentle Exercise Can Give You a Healthier Heart

Japanese-style walking, IWT, was developed by Japanese researchers to improve the cardiometabolic health of older adults.

**Want to take your Walking to the next level? Interval Walking Training (IWT), a scientifically proven training protocol, is a simple way to safely increase intensity and deliver significant health benefits.**



Also known as '*Japanese walking*,' IWT was developed by Japanese researchers to improve the cardiometabolic health of older adults.

Unlike high-intensity interval training (HIIT), IWT is a form of interval training that is suitable for all ages and fitness levels.

'Studies specifically looking at the benefits of interval training have found that fitness, muscle strength, and blood sugar control are all improved,' Sarah F. Eby, MD, a sports medicine specialist at Mass General Brigham Sports Medicine and associate professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at Harvard Medical School, told Healthline.

'Additionally, interval walking is a great way to meet the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week,' she notes.



## The Difference Between IWT and HIIT

**HIIT training involves alternating between periods of low-intensity exercise (or rest) and periods of high-intensity exercise for a predetermined number of sets.**

Intensity is often measured by heart rate or subjective measures such as rate of perceived exertion (RPE).

By increasing the intensity, you can achieve the same health benefits with less time in the gym. While generally considered safe, some studies have shown that HIIT workouts can lead to exercise-related injuries.

**In contrast, IWT or Japanese-style walking is less intense and is generally considered safe.**

According to the original study on Japanese-style walking published in Mayo Clinic Proceedings in 2009, the standard IWT protocol includes alternating periods of:

1. 3 minute brisk walk
2. 3 minutes slow walk
3. The recommended minimum interval is 30 minutes of walking five days a week.

For this study, Japanese researchers recruited more than 200 adults with an average age of 63 to test how effective IWT was compared to traditional "*continuous intensity*" walking.

They found that IWT outperformed traditional walking in improving a variety of health markers, including:

1. blood pressure
2. blood sugar
3. body mass index (BMI)
4. aerobic capacity
5. strength (an indicator of stability and balance)

As important as those health benefits are, this approach is something participants can stick to long term.

A follow-up analysis showed that 783 of the 826 subjects were able to adhere to the IWT method throughout the study period, a compliance rate of 95%.

A 2024 review of IWT concluded that its health benefits were "*well established in both healthy middle-aged and older adults and in people with metabolic diseases*."

' Compared to continuous walking training over time and energy expenditure, IWT was superior in improving fitness, body composition, and glycemic control in people with type 2 diabetes,' Kristian Karstoft, PhD, first author of the review, consultant and clinical associate professor at Bispebjerg and Frederiksberg Hospital at the University of Copenhagen , told Healthline .



## How to Get Started with Japanese Walking

1. Start with achievable goals. If you can't walk for 30 minutes when you first start, that's okay. Choose a goal that fits your fitness level.
2. Use the 'talk test' to check your intensity level. During periods of brisk walking, you should only be able to say a few words before you're out of breath.
3. Wear supportive walking shoes — if they're uncomfortable, you'll have a hard time sticking to your routine!
4. Know your body. If you feel pain or dizziness, slow down or stop.  
Track your workouts with a log or fitness tracker.

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