



What Is Japanese Walking? The 25-Minute Interval Walking Workout Backed by Research

By Dana Hudepohl
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- Japanese walking is a simple high-intensity interval walking method studied by Japanese researchers.
- It alternates 3 minutes of brisk walking with 2 to 3 minutes of easy recovery for 25 to 30 minutes total.
- The routine improves aerobic fitness, leg strength, and blood pressure more than steady-paced walking.

I love going for walks with friends. The conversation helps me to forget I'm even exercising, and we can end up walking for an hour or more. So when I heard about something called Japanese walking, I was eager to give it a try. From my first outing, I absolutely loved it. Even though I pushed myself more than during my normal walks, it felt surprisingly easy—and rewarding.

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What Is Japanese Walking?

The name Japanese walking stems from a [2007 study](#) by Japanese researchers in the journal *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. The method is as simple as putting on a pair

of sneakers and heading out for a walk. The only twist is that, for this walk, you rotate between two paces—one that gets a sweat going for 3 minutes and the next that allows you to cool down and recover for 2 to 3 minutes.

The researchers found most people could push hard for 3 minutes but recover quickly with a brief slower interval, making the workout both challenging and sustainable.

“It’s just very efficient, user-friendly, and even fun,” says Dennis Sluder, a certified personal trainer in Atlanta, Georgia. “Anybody, across age groups and ability levels, can incorporate this in some fashion. It’s low impact, but you get the benefits of polarized training.”

Why It Works

In short, pushing yourself briefly and then recovering fully creates outsized gains compared to walking at one steady pace. Those alternating efforts challenge your cardiovascular system and muscles in different ways, leading to more robust improvements.

In the five-month trial that popularized the method, researchers assigned adults in their 40s through 70s to one of three groups:

- High-intensity interval walkers following the 3-minutes-fast/2–3-minutes-easy pattern, four days a week or more
- Steady walkers moving at a moderate, 5-out-of-10 intensity for at least 8,000 steps a day, four days a week or more
- Sedentary

The high-intensity interval walkers experienced the greatest improvements, even though they spent *less* total time walking than the moderately paced group. They saw larger increases in aerobic capacity (VO2 max), more gains in leg strength, and more meaningful reductions in blood pressure (an average of 10 points for men and 8 points for women, compared to 3 points for steady-state

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walkers).

“In order to obtain improvements, we need to work at that higher level, but you can’t live in that high intensity all of the time — it’s not sustainable,” says Sluder. “Japanese walking allows you to push yourself during the higher intensity short bursts and then recover in real time, and that built-in recovery period keeps you from beating down your body with wear and tear.”

Long-term [follow-up research](#) suggests these benefits endure: Walkers who maintained this pattern for 10 years preserved more strength and aerobic capacity as they aged.

How to Do It

Put on comfortable sneakers and wear a watch or have your phone handy so you can keep track of the time. Then, get walking:

1. Walk 2 to 3 minutes at a slow pace, where it feels easy to hold a conversation (4-out-of-10 effort).
2. Walk 3 minutes at a ramped-up pace, where it feels difficult to hold a conversation (7-out-of-10 effort).
3. Repeat this rotation for at least 25 minutes.
4. Aim to walk at least four times a week.

When you’re walking slowly, “I want you to feel kind of bored,” says Sluder, “where there’s a feeling that you can push yourself even more.” And then when you’re walking for 3 minutes at high intensity, you want to be working hard enough that you look forward to the “reward” of a break, he says.

Heart Rate Targets

If you’d prefer to use a heart rate monitor to track your effort, here’s how to calculate your target rates for each interval.

- Subtract your age from 220. Multiply that number by 0.4. This is the heart rate you should aim for during the slow intervals.
- Subtract your age from 220. Multiply that number by 0.7. This is the heart rate you should aim for during the high-intensity intervals.

Sustaining a Practice

You may find that Japanese walking breaks up the monotony of traditional walking, and—because it’s so easy to finish quickly—it motivates you to exercise more frequently.

“Mentally, Japanese walking is not as intimidating as other cardio workouts because you know that you’re going to get a break and you know you’re going to be able to recover,” says Sluder.

Stick with the Japanese walking program for the long haul for excellent health benefits, or use it as an entry point into other HIIT training. You may feel inspired to set a treadmill to the highest hill incline—or even run—during the high-intensity segments since you know that you will be getting a breather. Or you could try applying these polarization principals to other exercise modalities whether an elliptical machine, rowing, swimming, or biking.

“You’re going to be challenged, but it’s not going to keep you from wanting to go out and do it all over again,” says Sluder. “You will feel like you pushed yourself, but at the same time, look forward to the next workout—which is important since the greatest single factor in whether your workout is going to be effective or not is consistency.”