NEWS LESSON

Rethinking the 10,000-Step Rule



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Does a round number make a goal easier to follow?
2. Would you walk more for a score or for somewhere enjoyable to go?
3. What makes a healthy habit easy to keep?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**baseline**	☐	A	present, but not obvious at first
2	**underlying**	☐	B	a disadvantage or problem with something
3	**diminishing**	☐	C	to do with the way research is carried out
4	**methodological**	☐	D	how strong or hard something is
5	**universal**	☐	E	a way of showing or describing something
6	**intensity**	☐	F	meant to apply to everyone
7	**representation**	☐	G	the starting level that later results are compared with
8	**drawback**	☐	H	getting smaller step by step

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The Lancet Public Health review places the substantial gains at roughly 7,000 steps, with diminishing returns beyond that. The 47% figure is a relative comparison drawn from observation, not a personal guarantee.

1 A day ending at 9,800 steps can feel like a near miss. The watch wanted five figures, although that exact target began as marketing for a Japanese pedometer in the 1960s. Later research has examined how steps relate to health. It offers a more useful picture than a single number everyone must reach.

2 A systematic review published in The Lancet Public Health in July 2025 included 57 studies, with 31 contributing to specific meta-analyses. The authors found that approximately 7,000 steps per day were associated with substantial benefits compared with lower activity levels. Several relationships showed diminishing returns beyond roughly 5,000 to 7,000 steps, although the pattern varied by outcome. The meaning of a step count also changes with context. Seven thousand steps on a steep route may feel very different from the same number accumulated slowly around a shopping centre.

3 One headline finding was that 7,000 steps, compared with 2,000, were associated with a 47% lower risk of death from any cause during follow-up. This is a relative comparison from observational evidence, not a promise that adding 5,000 steps will reduce an individual's risk by exactly that amount. Differences in underlying health and lifestyle may contribute to the observed relationships.

4 The attraction of a single target is obvious: it simplifies a complicated subject into something measurable. The drawback is that people vary enormously in mobility, age and circumstances. For somebody with a low baseline, a modest increase may be realistic and worthwhile; for somebody already active, further movement may offer benefits not captured by a universal daily rule. Setting a target can be motivating, but it becomes counterproductive when falling short of it is interpreted as failure. For some people, consistent improvement matters more than crossing a line.

5 There is an additional methodological issue with treating step totals as a complete representation of exercise. A pedometer captures one form of movement while providing limited information about intensity, muscle strengthening or activities such as cycling and swimming. Accessibility matters too: a universal walking target may be irrelevant or exclusionary for people with significant mobility limitations. Moreover, reverse causation is a potential complication in observational research.

6 Healthier participants may be capable of taking more steps partly because they are already healthier. Statistical methods attempt to address such differences, but they cannot rule out every source of uncertainty. None of these limitations undermines the value of regular activity. They simply caution against presenting any single number as a substitute for individually appropriate exercise and broader health advice.

7 The research encourages a more flexible view of exercise. Step counters can motivate, but they cannot judge whether a walk was enjoyable or whether the goal was appropriate for the person using them. A useful health habit should promote movement without making a round number the sole definition of success.

Sources: The Lancet Public Health. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The review found that the benefits stopped completely after 7,000 steps. T F NG
2. Someone who is already active might gain from movement that a step target does not capture. T F NG
3. The 47% figure compares people with two different daily step counts. T F NG
4. The authors recommend replacing step targets with activity minutes. T F NG
5. Fewer than half of the 57 studies contributed to specific meta-analyses. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

accumulated **capable** **complication** **hypothesis** **modest** **sole** **susceptible** **undermines**

1. Few people realise how much distance they have _____ by the end of a long shift on their feet.
2. Constantly missing a daily target _____ confidence rather than building it.
3. The trial was delayed by an unexpected _____ with the way the devices recorded movement.
4. Participants who were already _____ of walking long distances may have been healthier from the start.
5. A _____ rise of 500 steps a day is easier to maintain than a sudden doubling.
6. Treating the screen as the _____ judge of a good walk ignores enjoyment.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The headline figure invites _____ because the reduction in risk is relative. (INTERPRET)
2. A universal rule shows little _____ to differences in age and mobility. (SENSITIVE)
3. Trackers can give a _____ impression of how hard someone is exercising. (LEAD)
4. The authors stress that the findings may not be _____ to people who already exercise heavily. (APPLY)
5. Setting a target can be motivating, but the _____ of a missed day may discourage people. (DISAPPOINT)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some linkers join clauses (whereas, provided), albeit adds a short concession, nonetheless opens a sentence, and despite needs a noun or -ing form.

albeit	despite	hence	namely	nonetheless	provided	whereas

1. _____ their limitations, step counters can still prompt healthier habits.
2. A modest target suits a beginner, _____ an athlete may need a more demanding one.
3. The evidence is encouraging, _____ far from conclusive.
4. The data come from observation, not experiment. _____ , the same pattern appeared across many studies.
5. A target is helpful _____ it does not become a source of anxiety.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Would a lower target encourage you or make you do less?
2. Should an activity app celebrate small improvements instead of perfect days?
3. What could make everyday movement easier without turning it into homework?

9 Role-play: the step counter debate

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the step counter fan

You have walked 8,000 steps today and you want to reach 10,000 before bed. Ask your friend to come for another walk. Explain why the number matters to you.

Student B · the tired friend

You have had a long day and you don't want another walk. You have read that 7,000 steps is already good. Give your reasons, then suggest a different plan.

Useful phrases

I'd like to do another walk tonight.
I've only done 8,000 steps today.
That's not really necessary, is it?
The review says 7,000 is already good.
We're both tired, so why don't we go tomorrow?
Could we do a shorter walk instead?

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree on a plan, and who gave the better reasons?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 A · 3 H · 4 C · 5 F · 6 D · 7 E · 8 B

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 accumulated · 2 undermines · 3 complication · 4 capable · 5 modest · 6 sole

6 Word forms

1 misinterpretation · 2 sensitivity · 3 misleading · 4 applicable · 5 disappointment

7 Language focus

1 Despite · 2 whereas · 3 albeit · 4 Nonetheless · 5 provided

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