NEWS LESSON

The Step Target That Marketing Built



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	**precise**	☐	A	similar enough to be compared fairly
2	**investigating**	☐	B	the ability to move around easily
3	**interpretation**	☐	C	usual, following the normal way
4	**subsequent**	☐	D	exact and clear
5	**comparable**	☐	E	coming after something else
6	**conventional**	☐	F	your understanding of what something means
7	**mobility**	☐	G	correctly, without mistakes
8	**accurately**	☐	H	trying to find out the facts about something

3 Read

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

A 2025 review of 57 studies found substantial benefits by about 7,000 steps. Moving from 2,000 to 4,000 may matter more than reaching the famous figure.

1 Few health targets are as widely recognised as 10,000 steps a day. Fitness watches celebrate when we reach it, and some people take an extra walk before bed just to complete the challenge. Yet the number's history is more closely connected to marketing than to a precise scientific calculation.

2 A neat round number is easy to remember and share. That may explain why 10,000 steps took off so widely, even among people who have never read a study about exercise.

3 A Japanese pedometer introduced in the 1960s helped popularise the round figure. Although walking is beneficial, scientists have continued investigating whether health improvements really depend on reaching that particular target. The answer appears to be more flexible than the number suggests.

4 In July 2025, The Lancet Public Health published a systematic review covering 57 studies. Researchers found that approximately 7,000 daily steps were associated with substantial health benefits compared with very low step counts. For example, the analysis linked 7,000 rather than 2,000 daily steps with a considerably lower risk of death during the periods studied.

5 However, the findings need careful interpretation. The studies largely observed people's activity and subsequent health outcomes, so they cannot establish that walking alone caused every difference. Age, existing health, lifestyle and the intensity of movement all influence the picture. Nor does the review suggest that everybody should stop moving after step number 7,000. For a person currently walking very little, building up gradually could be more realistic than chasing a fixed number. What matters is making movement a habit rather than collecting a perfect score.

6 One positive message is that improvement matters. Somebody increasing their daily average from 2,000 to 4,000 steps may be making a meaningful change even if the famous target remains out of reach. A number that motivates one person can discourage another who struggles with mobility or a demanding schedule.

7 Different kinds of movement do not produce comparable step totals, so step counts leave out important information about physical activity. Cycling, swimming and strength training can contribute to fitness without producing many recorded steps, while a slow stroll and a brisk walk may have different effects despite similar totals. For people with disabilities or reduced mobility, conventional targets may be inappropriate or impossible.

8 The simplicity that makes a step counter attractive can therefore become misleading if the number is treated as a complete measure of health. Researchers also need to consider how accurately different devices record movement and whether participants' existing health influences how active they can be. A sensible recommendation takes account of those uncertainties and encourages movement in forms that people can sustain and enjoy.

9 Fitness tracking is most useful when it supports healthier habits without turning movement into a competition. The value of a walk is not limited to the number shown on a screen. Enjoyment, consistency and individual circumstances may matter more than completing an arbitrary daily challenge.

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. Somebody who goes from 2,000 to 4,000 steps a day may have made a meaningful change. T F NG
2. The review shows that walking alone caused every difference in health. T F NG
3. Fitness watches will be updated to show the new target. T F NG
4. A fixed target can discourage people who struggle with mobility. T F NG
5. The review found the same benefits at 2,000 steps as at 7,000 steps. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

considerably	contradict	flexible	misleading	outcomes	realistic	reluctant	sustain

1. It is hard to _____ a new exercise habit if the goal is too ambitious.
2. A headline with one big number can be _____ if it hides important details.
3. After a month of daily walks, her energy levels improved _____ .
4. A _____ plan, with different options each day, is easier to follow than a rigid one.
5. Aiming to walk twenty miles every day is not _____ for most people with full-time jobs.
6. Doctors compare patients' health _____ before and after the programme.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. The review _____ in July 2025 by The Lancet Public Health. (PUBLISH)
2. At this moment, researchers _____ new data on step counts. (COLLECT)
3. The findings _____ carefully. (SHOULD / INTERPRET)
4. By the time she checked her watch last night, she _____ 9,000 steps. (WALK)
5. Fitness watches _____ millions of people to walk further since they became popular. (ENCOURAGE)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some linkers go before a noun or -ing form, some join two clauses, and some start a new sentence after a full stop.

despite	however	meanwhile	therefore	unless	unlike	whereas

1. _____ being widely recognised, the number has no strong scientific basis.
2. The review covered 57 studies. _____ , it cannot prove that steps cause better health.
3. The studies only observed people. _____ , they cannot show what caused the differences.
4. A step counter suits some people, _____ it discourages others.
5. A target can be useful _____ it makes people feel like failures.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 sustain · 2 misleading · 3 considerably · 4 flexible · 5 realistic · 6 outcomes

6 Verb forms

1 was published · 2 are collecting · 3 should be interpreted · 4 had walked · 5 have encouraged

7 Language focus

1 Despite · 2 However · 3 Therefore · 4 whereas · 5 unless

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