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HEALTHY LIVING

This Japanese Walking Method Is a Trend Worth Trying

It's a low-impact, science-backed approach that's helping older adults build strength, boost energy and stay active

By

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Japanese walking, also known as interval walking training, gives you all the cardiovascular, muscular and metabolic benefits of a workout — without the pounding on the pavement.

JADE SCHULZ

I started running when I turned 50. On Day 1, I didn't just lace up and sprint around the block.

I eased into it by following the run/walk/run method, a brilliant approach designed to help people of any age or ability enjoy running without injury. Created by Jeff Galloway, an Olympian and coach, his philosophy is simple: Alternate short bursts of running with [walking](#) breaks. This rhythm helped me build endurance, protect my joints and fall in love with the sport.

On a dare from my youngest daughter, I signed up for the New York City Marathon, and went on to complete 16 other marathons and countless shorter races, ranging from 5k to 10K and 10-milers. I even did one ultramarathon — 60K — to celebrate my 60th birthday.

But recently, an injury brought my running life to a screeching halt.

A stress fracture in my knee, compounded by [arthritis](#), meant I had to stop, at least for the time being. Just like that, I went from 15 to 20 miles a week to zero. And it showed. I lost muscle, gained weight, felt sluggish, and boy oh boy was I grumpy.

That's when I knew it was time to reassess and tweak — my go-to strategy for navigating any major life change.

And it led me to something that felt surprisingly familiar: Japanese walking, also known as [interval](#) walking training (IWT). This method of walking has been around for decades, but it's become trendy on social media in the past year.

It's not just health professionals who are taking notice. Japanese walking is exploding on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Search hashtags like [#intervalwalking](#), [#fastslowwalk](#), [#walkforhealth](#) or [#japanesewalking](#) and you'll find thousands of videos, many posted by people over age 50 who are documenting their transformations. They're [losing weight](#), gaining energy and rediscovering a love of movement.



The author did a Japanese interval walk at the Virginia Beach 10 Miler in August 2025.

COURTESY BARBARA HANNAH GRUFFERMAN

As a writer and podcast host, I scour medical journals for ideas, inspiration and guests, and it was in one of these publications that I found some fascinating research about this import from Japan. When I first learned about this way of walking — alternating fast and slow walking for a specific amount of time — it clicked immediately. Why? Because I was already trained in this pattern, thanks to the Galloway program. I'd had years of experience transitioning between effort and recovery, tuning into my breathing and finding rhythm in movement.

Only now, instead of [running](#) and walking, it was fast walking and normal walking. The beauty of Japanese walking is that it gives you all the [cardiovascular](#), muscular and metabolic benefits of a workout — without the pounding.

What is Japanese walking?

Interval walking was developed in the early 2000s by Dr. Hiroshi Nose and his team at Shinshu University in Matsumoto, Japan. Their goal was to create a safe, effective movement practice for aging adults, one

that would improve health outcomes without overstraining their bodies.

They tested a simple format: five sets of fast walking for three minutes, followed by three minutes of slow walking, performed five days a week. A landmark 2007 study from Dr. Nose's team showed that in just five months participants saw major [improvements in endurance, strength and blood pressure](#). Follow-up studies in 2019 and 2023 focused on cholesterol, blood sugar levels and weight. Everything improved.

In Japan, interval walking became a public health success story. Today, it's spreading globally, especially among older adults who are looking for joint-friendly ways to get and stay fit.

Health benefits of Japanese walking

To understand why it's so effective, I contacted Melinda Hahm, an exercise physiologist at the Mayo Clinic Health System Cardiac Center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

"Interval walking training improves cardiorespiratory fitness by increasing your body's ability to consume oxygen by making your heart and lungs strong," Hahm explains. This boost in oxygen use means your body becomes more efficient during everything from going up stairs to dancing at weddings.

But it doesn't stop there.

"Interval training increases blood flow to muscles, improves muscle endurance and helps you maintain — and even gain — muscle mass," says Hahm.

As we age, we [naturally lose muscle](#): 1 percent to 2 percent per year after 50. Interval walking can help slow or even reverse that process, especially if combined with light strength or resistance training.

“Interval walking training burns more calories than leisurely walking,” Hahm says, “which promotes greater fat loss.” And since this fast/slow way of walking includes short bursts of high effort, it also raises your metabolic rate after the workout — meaning you continue to burn extra calories even when at rest.

Hahm shared even more benefits with me: “It can improve insulin sensitivity, which helps manage blood sugar and lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome.”

Bonus: Because it’s considered a weight-bearing exercise, “it’s good for bone health, too.”

Why the sudden popularity?

- **It’s accessible.** No gym required. No fancy gear. Just a good pair of walking shoes.
- **It’s adaptable.** You can scale it up or down depending on your fitness level or how you’re feeling that day. I often base my program on either doing three to four miles, or on time, like 45 minutes.
- **It’s time-efficient.** A full workout can take less than an hour.
- **It’s social.** You can do what I did: Put the word out to friends and neighbors and create a walking club which uses this technique.
- **It’s effective.** The science behind this program backs it up — and the personal success stories, including mine, prove it.

Losing weight, gaining muscle while training

After just a few weeks of interval walking, my fitness started to come back. I felt stronger, dropped the extra pounds, regained muscle and definitely felt more energized and, yes, happier.

In fact, back in May, I used the interval walking method to speed-walk the iconic Brooklyn Half Marathon, a race I'd run for many years. One of the things that really got me down when I realized that running might not be in my future was not participating in any races. Well, on that day, I showed that you can still cross the finish line and get a pretty cool medal without running.

Embracing interval walking is the perfect example of reassessing and tweaking. I took a hard look at where I was presently, not at my past self, and adjusted what I was doing and how I was moving my body. In fact, I love this way of walking so much that I no longer miss running. I never thought I would say that.

Who should consider interval walking?

If you are: over 50 and want to maintain or improve your fitness; new to exercise and looking for a low-impact way to start; recovering from injury or have ongoing joint pain; looking to lose weight, regain energy, fight diabetes or just feel great. In all those scenarios, interval walking could be the solution you've been looking for.

As Hahm puts it, "Interval walking adds purpose and structure to your walks. It makes the most of your time, especially for adults in midlife and beyond."

How to get started

- 1. Warm-up (10 minutes):** Begin with 10 minutes of gentle walking. Loosen your joints. Get your posture aligned. Let your arms swing naturally.
- 2. Fast interval (3 minutes):** Pick up the pace. You should feel breathless but not gasping. Pump your arms. Take longer strides, landing on your heels each time. Get your heart rate up.
- 3. Recovery walk (3 minutes):** Return to your regular pace. Focus on steady breathing through your nose and diaphragm. Slow down as much as you need to get your heart rate lower.

4. Repeat this cycle for five rounds of 3 minutes of fast walking and 3 minutes of slow walking.

5. Cooldown (5 minutes; optional but highly recommended): Finish with a few minutes of relaxed walking and light stretching.

How often? Aim for at least three times a week, but work up to five or six.

As we get older, movement becomes more essential, and sometimes more complicated. But what I've learned from years of running, walking, pausing and restarting is this: We can't control getting older, but we can control how we do it.

Interval walking gave me the structure I needed to rebuild my strength and confidence. It was familiar, forgiving and empowering. And it reminded me that our bodies still crave challenge and respond beautifully to it, at any age.

Barbara Hannah Grufferman is a contributing writer who focuses on positive aging. She is the author of Love Your Age and the host of the podcast GRUFFtalk: How to Age Better.