



# Barefoot Cobblestone Walking Lowers Blood Pressure

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The ancient Chinese practice of walking barefoot on paths made of river stones is good for health in more ways than one.

Researchers from Oregon Research Institute, motivated to identify low-cost forms of exercise to improve functioning in older adults, found that cobblestone mat walking not only improved balance and mobility but also reduced blood pressure more than regular walking,

Investigators studied the benefits of cobblestone walking compared to regular walking, in addition to weekly group exercise sessions, in a group of 108 inactive older adults aged 60–92 years.

Participants were randomly assigned to either a regular walking group or a cobblestone mat walking group.

Each group walked for 30 minutes at least three times per week in addition to taking a 60-minute group exercise session three times per week over a 16-week period.

Why cobblestone walking lowers blood pressure is unclear.

One possibility is that it acts like a gravity-based massage that relaxes the body and lowers blood pressure in the process, according to John Fisher, PhD, one of the researchers (October 2005 Harvard Heart Letter).

While the outcome was positive for cobblestone walking, the study authors noted that their research had some limitations.

The study lacked strength measurements. Also, assessors knew the identity of each participant's group, which may have contributed to outcome bias.

This lack of blinding, however, was offset by other factors: Assessors didn't know either previous assessment scores or the study hypothesis, and assessments were based on standardized and validated objective performance evaluations.

More research was recommended.

The study appeared in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2005; [53] 8, 1305–12).

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