

Mindful Walking

Walking is a great way to integrate mindfulness into your everyday life and has been practiced as a meditative technique for thousands of years. However, when we walk it's often on auto pilot- the legs are moving whilst the mind is elsewhere, away from the present moment. Mindful Walking is about allowing you to become present and connect to what is happening in the here and now.

How to walk mindfully

The following guide outlines different techniques you can use to walk mindfully including 'Slow Walking'. This is based on 'Kinh Hanh', which is a Buddhist practice that literally means slow walking in Vietnamese.

You can also practice Mindful Walking by tuning into each of your senses in turn. Allow about thirty seconds for each and allow any thoughts to come and go.

You may find tuning into the senses heightens your awareness of pleasant or unpleasant things which may encourage your mind to wander. If this happens gently guide it back to focusing on the senses.

Be kind to yourself and accept that your mind cannot stop producing thoughts. It's simply what it does. So, when thoughts pop into your mind just gently return your focus to the senses or the act of Mindful Walking.

You may find it helpful to silently say "just thinking" or "just thoughts" to yourself. By saying this it is as if you are inwardly nodding at your thoughts, acknowledging them, as if they were someone walking past you in the street; having acknowledged them you continue on your way, in this case by returning your attention to Mindful Walking.

The start

Take a few deep breaths. Be aware of each breath and then just allow your breathing to return to normal. Slowly bring your awareness into the present and then take some time to tune into each of the senses in turn...

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Physical sensations or feelings

Start by standing still and become aware of how you feel. Notice...

- Your posture- become aware of the way you're stood
- Your body- does it feel heavy or light, stiff or relaxed?
- Your feet in your shoes
- Your muscles as you balance

Slow walking

Start by walking slowly and coordinate each step with your breath; as you breathe in take one step with the left foot. As you breathe out take another step with the right foot. Continue this cycle always coordinating the left leg with your in-breath and the right leg with your out-breath.

As you do this hold your head still, focusing your attention about five feet ahead and being aware of your body. Relax the muscles of the mouth with a gentle smile. Move slowly and try to relax as much as possible. Keep your breathing relaxed and light and if necessary, alter the length of your steps so that the breathing can remain consistent.

You can repeat the following 'Gathas' if you find this helpful:

- "In-in-in... out-out-out" (each word representing one step)
- "Breathing in, I am aware that I am breathing in; breathing out, I smile"
- "Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment; breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment"

Count to 10

Now increase your walking pace a bit and as you do so count each step until you reach 10 and then start back at one again. Do this for a few minutes.

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Returning your awareness to physical sensations or feelings

As you continue walking shift your attention to the sensation of movement in the body noticing...

- The sensation of the soles of the feet touching the ground with each step
- The lifting and falling of each foot
- How your foot rolls from heel to toe
- The muscles and tendons in your feet and legs
- Movement in your legs
- How the weight shifts from the right side to the left side and then back again, usually in quite a steady rhythm
- The movement and muscles elsewhere in your body
- The weight of your arms swinging at your side

Also notice other sensations and feelings, e.g. the air temperature, feeling of warm sunshine, cool rain or a cold breeze against your skin.

Sounds

Notice sounds without labelling or naming them, without getting caught up in thinking about the objects of the sounds.

- What can you hear that is nearby?
- What can you hear that is far away?
- What is the loudest sound?
- What is the quietest sound?
- Can you walk without making a noise?

Smells

Pay attention to any smells. If there is more than one smell notice the strongest and weakest. If your mind leads you back to a memory associated with any smells just acknowledge this and let it go.

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Vision

Notice colours, shapes and objects and anything else you can see. Pay attention to movement and stillness, light, shadows and textures too.

- What can you see that is nearby?
- What can you see that is far away?
- What is the biggest thing you can see?
- What is the smallest thing you can see?
- What can you see that has the most movement?

The finish

In the last moments, come back to awareness of the physical sensations of walking, wherever else your mind found itself throughout the practice.

- The sensation of the soles of the feet touching the ground with each step
- The lifting and falling of each foot
- How your foot rolls from heel to toe
- The muscles and tendons in your feet and legs
- Movement in your legs
- How the weight shifts from the right side to the left side and then back again, usually in quite a steady rhythm
- The movement and muscles elsewhere in your body
- The weight of your arms swinging at your side

Stop, stand still and take a few deep breaths and then let your breathing to return to normal.

Now look around and take in your surroundings using your senses as much as possible.

Before you finish, consider how you might bring this kind of awareness into the rest of your day.

Happy mindfulness everyone- be here now!

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Sources:

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