

MINDFUL MOVEMENT: A WALKING MEDITATION

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This mindfulness practice is like a walking body scan and brings awareness to all areas in the body. It enables you to bring this practice into your daily life. We are going to do slow steps and focus attention on different areas of your body.

Benefits

- It is unlikely that you will fall asleep
- It allows you to be present in the whole body
- You can do it anywhere – inside or outside
- It counts as exercise
- Helps you to inhabit the body, rather than the mind
- Can be easier to focus than sitting meditation due to movement
- There are lots of sensations to be aware of as you walk
- It's a good way of practising mindfulness in daily life

Ways to vary

- Speed up, or slow down
- Walk up and down stairs or hills
- Try it in nature – feel the wind, take your shoes off and feel the earth or grass beneath your feet
- Pause at the end of each step
- Take your shoes off – or experiment with different socks!

Problems & Solutions

- Mind wandering – if you're outside you might have more external stimuli to distract you - this is completely normal – just gently bring it back to the physical sensations in the body
- May increase feelings of pain or tiredness – slow down or stop if this happens
- You might find it difficult to tune into left and right parts of your body. Either slow down completely or just focus on one side for a while, and then the other
- You can't remember all the points of the practice – it doesn't matter! Just work your way up the body from the feet. Or listen to a recording of this as you walk (find on coachyourselfbetter.com)

Further practices

For different forms of mindful movement, see:

- Breathworks – search mindful movement on YouTube to move within range of movement
- Insight Timer – search mindful movement
- Mindfulmovements.co.uk
- Mindful.org – search mindful movement
- 5Rhythms.com – a dynamic movement practice



THE PRACTICE



Before you start

- To tune into the sensations more strongly, slow down – in the beginning, it might be good to do the practice somewhere private as you learn to focus on the sensations.
- If you become aware of any tension, just let it go and allow one foot to go in front of the other. Slow down or stop if it is painful.
- If it feels natural to say, include the feet with the ankles, or the legs with the hips, do that. This is just a guide. The purpose is to be in the present and notice sensations rather than being specific about which part.
- Decide where you're going to walk...to and fro? How many steps? Or somewhere specific?
- Remember, if your mind wanders, just gently bring it back and focus on the physical sensations.

The Practice

Begin by paying attention to your breath, to take you from doing mode, to being mode. Allow your eyes a soft focus. Begin to move slowly...

Feet – place your attention on the soles of your feet. Notice how they make contact with your socks, shoes and the ground. Feel your weight as you put your feet on the floor. Notice how this shifts as you use your left and right feet. How does the foot move? Which part goes down first? Become aware of all the different sensations in your feet.

Ankles – raise your attention to your ankles; again feel the shift of weight from left to right. Try to be as relaxed as possible. If you feel tension, try to let it go.

Legs – now move your attention to your lower legs. Expand to include the knees and upper legs. Feel how all the muscles and joints work together. Can you feel the contact with your clothing? Notice what your thigh muscles are doing; can you distinguish front from back?

Hips – become aware of how your hips move as you walk. Are you able to feel the sensations in the muscles around your hips?

Tummy and back – move your focus up and become aware of your tummy area. How does this sensation change as you move? Can you feel your tummy muscles tense as you walk? How about your lower back muscles? Tune into any sensations in your back. Now expand your attention to include all of your back. What do you feel there?

Chest – come round the front now to your chest. Can you feel it rise and fall with your breath? Can you notice your breath has speeded up since you began the practice?

Arms, shoulders and hands – Let your shoulders be relaxed as you walk. How do they move with the rhythm of your movements? Are your arms swinging? Notice sensations in your upper arms, your lower arms and your hands.

Neck – focus on the sensations in your neck and how it feels supporting your head. Notice the feeling of air as you walk.

Head – just pay attention to the physical feeling of your head. Your chin, your lips, your tongue in your mouth, your jaw. Let it be relaxed as you walk. Just allow your eyes to relax. Now move your attention to your forehead and temples. What do you feel there? Finally, can you feel the hair on your scalp?

Entire body – switch your attention now to encompass the whole body and appreciate how all the joints, muscles and organs work together in perfect unison to enable you to walk.

Finish the practice by becoming aware of your breath again. Take in the sights around you and your surroundings, and in your own time, end the practice.

