

Health Benefits of Mindful Walking

Leave Stress Behind with Mindful Walking

Ever wish you could leave stress behind? You can, and you don't have to travel very far to do it.

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Mindful walking works whenever, wherever stress strikes.

There are dozens of strategies you can use to deal with stress: meditation, breathing exercises, even cursing. But perhaps the most effective tool you can use (that won't get you in trouble) is mindful walking. Although remarkably simple to do, it's a very powerful form of walking meditation that can defuse stress within minutes.

Mindful walking relaxes the body by channeling anxiety and nervous energy into physical activity and calms the mind by promoting focused awareness. It's like pushing your reset button, and you can do it in as little time as it takes to walk to the bathroom. Plus, it's versatile: You don't need to put on hiking boots, leave civilization, or climb a mountain to experience this restorative power of walking.

The goal is to use walking meditation to gently shift the focus of your attention from worrying about the past or the future, and to focus on what is actually happening in the present moment. All too often, we're thinking about where we're going, and what we'll be doing when we get there. Or we're lost in thought about where we've been. Mindful walking is about being in the present—paying attention to the thoughts, feelings, and sensations we are experiencing right now as well as the ground underfoot and the feeling of the sun or the wind on your face. Even if you're not in an outdoor setting, the act of walking and putting yourself in the present moment can indeed reset your mood and release your stress.

Mindful walking can also clear your mind and make you more creative and productive in your day-to-day work. The movement of walking induces a relaxed mental state that dissolves the block to creative thinking that is caused by tension and stress. You come back to your desk, easel, or computer screen with a fresher mind—and often with new ideas to try out. Like “sleeping” on a problem, part of your mind seems to keep working on a quandary while you're walking, even if you're not consciously aware of it.

Here is a simple mindful walking exercise you can practice whenever you need it:

- 1: While walking, pay attention to your breathing. Use this focus on the breath as an anchor to stabilize your attention.
- 2: Next, allow yourself to notice any sights, sounds, or physical sensations that may come up as you walk. Rest your awareness for a moment on that sight, sound, or sensation, then return your awareness to your breathing.
- 3: If persistent thoughts distract you from your mindful awareness, simply notice them, then return your awareness to your breathing.

Here is a variation of mindful walking that uses your breathing to consciously connect you to your natural surroundings:

1: As you focus on your breath, following the instructions above, remember that plants release the oxygen that you're breathing into your lungs, and that, in turn, you breathe out the carbon dioxide that the plants take in.

2: In your mind's eye, follow your breath as you exhale. Imagine that you can see the carbon dioxide molecules leaving your nose or mouth and flowing into the leaves on the plants nearest you as you walk.

3: As you breathe in, envision yourself inhaling the oxygen that the plants are giving off. Picture the trails of oxygen flowing from the trees, grass, flowers and shrubs into your lungs. Take note of how your visualization of this very natural process affects your sense of the world around you.

More info about Mindful Walking:


<http://www.livingwell.org.au/mindfulness-exercises-3/4-walking-mindfulness/?lang-es>

http://bpd.about.com/od/livingwithbpd/ht/mind_walking.htm

<http://www.mindful.org/mindful-magazine/walk-this-way>

<http://life.gaiam.com/article/how-be-more-mindful-just-breathing-and-walking>