



## MINDFUL WALKING FOR ADULTS

*"Walk as if you are kissing the earth with your feet."*

— *Thich Nhat Hanh*

### OVERVIEW

Cultivate calmness by becoming aware of your body as you walk, feeling the sensations of slow and deliberate movement.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the year
- Before class begins, during prep time, during lunch, at the end of a school day
- When you are feeling stressed and overwhelmed
- Before or during a staff meeting

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 10 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Adult
- College

#### MATERIALS

- Indoor or outdoor space for walking 10-15 paces

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

You will:

- Practice walking slowly and deliberately while maintaining attention on your body's movements

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- How do you feel about walking to simply experience walking—rather than walking to get somewhere?
- Are you ready to slow down and focus on the micro-movements in your body?
- What will help you to focus on your body right now?
- If you are leading this mindfulness practice with a group, consider how the participants might respond. How can you prepare yourself to model and experience slow, deliberate, and focused attention?

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Whether alone or leading a group, take a few deep breaths.
- Settle into a quiet mental space for reflection.
- If leading a group, remind participants that they are encouraged but not required to participate. (Students or staff are welcome to sit quietly if they choose not to participate.)

### FIND A LOCATION

- Find a lane that allows you to walk back and forth for 10-15 paces—a place that is relatively peaceful, where you won't be disturbed or even observed (since a slow, formal walking meditation can look strange to people who are unfamiliar with it). You can practice walking meditation either indoors or outside in nature. The lane doesn't have to be very long since the goal is not to reach a specific destination, just to practice a very intentional form of walking where you're mostly retracing your steps.

### START YOUR STEPS

- Walk 10-15 steps along the lane you've chosen, and then pause and breathe for as long as you like. When you're ready, turn and walk back in the opposite direction to the other end of the lane, where you can pause and breathe again. Then, when you're ready, turn once more and continue with the walk.

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## THE COMPONENTS OF EACH STEP

- Walking meditation involves very deliberating thinking about and doing a series of actions that you normally do automatically. Breaking these steps down in your mind may feel awkward, even ridiculous. But you should try to notice at least these four basic components of each step:
  - the lifting of one foot;
  - the moving of the foot a bit forward of where you're standing;
  - the placing of the foot on the floor, heel first;
  - the shifting of the weight of the body onto the forward leg as the back heel lifts while the toes of that foot remain touching the floor or the ground.
- Then the cycle continues, as you:
  - lift your back foot totally off the ground;
  - observe the back foot as it swings forward and lowers;
  - observe the back foot as it makes contact with the ground, heel first;
  - feel the weight shift onto that foot as the body moves forward.

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## SPEED

- You can walk at any speed, but in Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, walking meditation is slow and involves taking small steps. Most important is that it feel natural, not exaggerated or stylized.

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## HANDS AND ARMS

- You can clasp your hands behind your back or in front of you, or you can just let them hang at your side—whatever feels most comfortable and natural.

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## FOCUSING YOUR ATTENTION

- As you walk, try to focus your attention on one or more sensations that you would normally take for granted, such as your breath coming in and out of your body; the movement of your feet and legs, or their contact with the ground or floor; your head balanced on your neck and shoulders; sounds nearby or those caused by the movement of your body; or whatever your eyes take in as they focus on the world in front of you.

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## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR MIND WANDERS

- No matter how much you try to fix your attention on any of these sensations, your mind will inevitably wander. That's OK—it's perfectly natural. When you notice your mind wandering, simply try again to focus it one of those sensations.

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## INTEGRATING WALKING MEDITATION INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE

- For many people, slow, formal walking meditation is an acquired taste. But the more you practice, even for short periods of time, the more it is likely to grow on you. Keep in mind that you can also bring mindfulness to walking at any speed in your everyday life, and even to running, though of course the

pace of your steps and breath will change. In fact, over time, you can try to bring the same degree of awareness to any everyday activity, experiencing the sense of presence that is available to us at every moment as our lives unfold. Reflection After the Practice

- What did you notice in yourself as you engaged in this practice?
- Which aspects of the practice were most memorable?
- What would happen if you practiced walking in this way one or more times a week?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Walking meditation](#), a key practice featured in Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, is a widely used method for cultivating mindfulness. In addition to increasing mindfulness more generally, this practice can promote awareness both of our internal sensations, our physical bodies, and our external surroundings, tuning us into experiences that we often miss when we move through our day on autopilot.

MBSR, which has been adapted and studied over the last several decades, includes other practices like the [body scan](#), mindful yoga, and [mindful breathing](#). Research tells us that these practices help people to manage chronic [pain](#), [stress](#), [anxiety](#), and [symptoms of distress](#).

In fact, teachers who practice mindfulness for just a few weeks report a range of [positive outcomes](#), including a decrease in [burnout](#), [stress](#), [anxiety](#), and [depression](#). They also experience a range of physical [health](#) benefits, including better [sleep quality](#).

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

At school, much of our time is spent rushing—preoccupied with our next activity or class that we don’t really notice what we’re doing now. As we increase our sensory and mental awareness, mindfulness can help us to navigate our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors at school and at home so that we ultimately respond more constructively to others. Teachers who practice mindfulness report [reduced interpersonal problems](#) and more [emotionally supportive](#) relationships with the students in their classrooms.

## SOURCE

Adapted from a guided walking meditation led by mindfulness expert [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#). This and other guided meditations can be found in his audiobook, [Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life](#).