

Mindful Walking

As we go through our day, we usually do not notice the opportunities to practice mindful walking: walking to our car, walking in the grocery store, walking while at work, etc. We have the choice to consciously take advantage of these short walking moments and become fully present to our daily lives. This tool can help us do this.

The purpose of mindful walking is to develop awareness of each moment without having an end destination. By feeling our feet on the ground and noticing each muscle involved in each step, we begin to cultivate body awareness and focus. We walk just to walk. This practice can be performed anywhere at any time. The goal of the exercise is similar as in other meditation practices: cultivate awareness of the present moment, in this case by using the feet as an anchor for attention.

Instructions

1. Start by standing in one spot noticing how weight is transferred from one foot to the other. Notice the slight muscle adjustments in your legs, ankles, and feet which help balance and keep you upright.
2. Begin walking normally.
3. With each step, notice the whole stepping process: how the heel, the ball, and the toes make contact with the floor and then how it feels to lift the foot to take a next step. Focus on your feet going through this process as you walk.
4. Beyond contact with the floor, notice other sensations around your feet: possibly a sock against your skin, the warmth inside your shoes, how your toes connect and rub with each step, etc.
5. Relax into your walking and begin to move your attention upward from your feet to your ankles, then ankles to calves, and finally from calves to shins. As you shift your attention, remain present to all sensations including the temperature of your skin, how each part makes contact with clothing or air, and muscle movements with each step. As you focus your attention on each area, make a conscious choice to relax each part.
6. Now, move your attention upward from your shins to your thighs, from your thighs to hamstrings, hamstrings to inner groin, your inner groin into the pelvis, and finally to your right and left hip. Notice how your body moves with each step. One hip may rise and the other falls.
7. Expand upward to your stomach. What's the temperature?
8. Move upward to your chest and feel each breath as it comes in and out.

9. Begin to notice your right and then left shoulder. Notice how each moves as you walk. Do they move with or opposite your hips? Let your arms hang and gently swing by your sides.

10. Now notice your arms, working down through the upper arms, elbows, forearms, wrists, palms of your hands, and fingers.

11. Working through the body, notice your neck. What muscles are supporting it? How is your neck positioned?

12. Begin to move your attention to your face. Relax your jaw; release any tension. Relax your eyes. How do they feel resting in their sockets? With soft eyes, focus the gaze of your attention on the skyline. Disregard any movement around you.

13. Now slow your walking pace and come to a natural stop and simply stand. Observe how it feels to no longer be in motion. Simply standing upright, moving the focus of your attention back down the legs into the feet, noticing how it feels to have observed yourself for this time.