

Mindful Work

Mindful walking

There are **four postures** in meditation practices; standing, walking, sitting and lying down. We are most familiar with sitting practices, but it is important to develop mindfulness whatever position we're in, and whether we're stationary or moving.

For walking practices, you need to find a level area, where ideally you can take several paces in a straight line. It is particularly effective to walk barefoot on the grass, if possible, but it is perfectly feasible to just walk the length of your bed and back to carry out this exercise effectively.

Although it may be counter-intuitive, walking meditation can create an incredible sense of stillness. This is important, as it provides an analogy with daily life, where we need to be able to connect with a sense of calm centring, however busy and stressful things get.

One actually begins with standing, and at any point in the walking meditation, it can be useful to pause where we are, breathe, and check-in to how we feel. Whilst it is useful to practise slow walking until you become very familiar with it, it's also good to trust your intuition about when it would be better to stop walking, and stand or sit.

Slow walking is an alternative to sitting practices, and may suit fidgety people better! We'll also learn 'mindful walking' which is practised at normal speed and can therefore be more easily applied in the normal course of the day (if you slow walk along the corridor at work, they'll probably send you home worrying that you've finally lost it completely!

Exercise: Slow walking

First, mark out the distance you are going to walk, or decide on the number of paces you will take, which ideally will be an odd number between 5 and 17.

Begin with a relaxed standing posture, with your head level and looking ahead, perhaps with the eyes soft focused on the ground a few metres in front of you.

Remain standing long enough to feel an unhurried connection with the Earth beneath your feet.

The walking is incredibly slow, so that you can stay aware of every tiny movement, from the toes to the top of your head. The main focus of attention, however, is on the soles of the feet and your contact with the ground.

The walking breaks into 4 components: shifting, lifting, moving and placing. The video shows how this is done.

When you have walked the defined number of paces or the marked distance, you stop for a few seconds, turn, then pause again and stand mindfully, before walking back again.

Slow walking is a great preparation for mindful breathing or mindful listening practices.

Exercise: Mindful walking in daily life

Following on from the slow walking, you can now speed this up to normal walking speed and see if you can stay mindful. At what speed do you lose the mindfulness? *At this point you can try to break the walking into the four components.*

1. **Movement.** *The first is to simply stay mindful of all movements of your body and in particular the movement of the soles of your feet and the contact with the ground. You can extend this awareness to the entire movement of your body through space.*
2. **Smiling.** *As you walk you imagine a big smile in your body. This smile feeling is infectious and expands and overflows from you, into the ground and into the air and to all things around you.*
3. **Breathing.** *Starting with the basic practice of tuning into the in-breath and out-breath, we then extend this to imagining that the whole body is breathing. It's as if all pores of our skin are like little noses breathing in the scents of the air and of other things all around us.*
4. *Finally, we develop a sense of **being supported**. At its simplest, there's just the awareness of our feet on the ground, in contact with the earth. However, we could extend this to feel gratitude to everything in our environment, from the oxygen exhaled by plants, to the support of other people and even the pavement or grass we're walking on.*

In just the same way that breathing is always available to us as a means of centring and touching base, there are many opportunities to do this walking practice in the normal course of our day. For example, walking to the toilet, walking to the bus stop, walking from the car park to the office, walking down the corridor etc. And you can do this practice without anyone knowing!