

5 steps to mindful walking

Find a spot. Choose a place, indoors or outdoors, where you feel confident and can walk comfortably.

Find your breath. Walk slowly and focus on your breathing. Count the number of steps you take as you inhale and exhale. Take four steps on the inhale and four on the exhale.

Find a mantra. Say a phrase to yourself (one word for each step) such as, "I am at peace, all is well now." The mantra will make it easier for you to focus on walking and quiet your mind from thoughts related to the rest of your life.

Find your senses. As you move, observe the sensory experience of the walk. Feel the ground against your feet, the texture of your clothes against your skin, and the breath flowing through your nostrils and notice the sounds, smells and sights around you, especially if you're outside.

Find patience. Don't get frustrated if you have trouble staying focused. It's not easy to do, but the benefits are many if you stick with meditative walking. Concentrate on your breathing and, as Archer recommends, "Let the walk, walk you."

Techniques

Walking Meditation #1: Focus on Your Feet

This technique is very simple, making it great for beginners. In this method, the focus is your feet as they touch the ground. Your eyes are aimed a few steps ahead, and your mind is cleared of all thoughts and emotions extraneous to your keen awareness of each foot, as you place it on the ground. With each step, you focus your attention only on the contact of your foot with the ground, and when your mind wanders from this focus, you bring it back to your foot. You could actually practice this form in your own backyard, or even indoors, as you can walk in a circle or back and forth in a line.

Walking Meditation #2: Focus on the Six Sensations

The second way to practice walking meditation is similar to the first, with a slight variation in focus. Once you've mastered the first technique, you'll be ready for a little more challenge. You focus only on the sensations of your feet, noticing the pattern of lifting, pushing, and dropping of your feet as you walk. Eventually you will notice all six of the components of walking—raising, lifting, pushing, dropping, touching, and pressing. As you walk, you will notice that your mind will inevitably wander from this focus. The skill you work to develop is to refocus your awareness to the sensations of your feet, observing each component, each time it takes place. You can even chant the components softly as you walk. Obviously, a walking meditation beginner would probably not be able to power walk, as the goal of walking meditation is to calm the mind, not send it spinning.