

What is a Walking Meditation?

Meditation is a tool to ground us in the present moment. It is not an attempt to turn off your thoughts or feelings. Instead, it is a way to notice your thoughts without judgment or reaction and be present in the here and now. Often meditation focuses on our breathing patterns and increases our awareness of the world around us.

Walking can be a great opportunity for meditation. Think about the last time you took a walk by yourself outside. Did you listen to music or a podcast? Make a phone call?

Mentally plan out your grocery list? Most likely you didn't walk in silence and use your senses to observe the world around you. We usually walk on autopilot and forget to take notice of our surroundings. While a sitting meditation helps us become aware of our breathing patterns, a walking meditation shifts our focus to the rhythm of our gait.

Use these cues to guide your own walking meditation in whatever setting is accessible to you – your neighborhood, the woods, a parking lot, the city streets, or even a small indoor space where you can pace about 10 steps back and forth. You can participate in a walking meditation in any of these settings.

A Walking Meditation Guide

How to Start

Pause before you begin. Take a mindful breath in and breathe out. Begin your walk at a natural pace.

Physical Sensations

As you start to walk, pay attention to the lifting and falling of each foot on the ground – the pressure and sensation of each sole as it touches and leaves the ground. Notice your arms move as you walk and how your weight shifts in your body. Pay attention to how your body feels – heavy or light? Stiff or relaxed?

Take note of your posture and how your head rests on your neck and shoulders.

Visual Observations

Use your eyes to observe what's happening around you – other people, falling leaves, trees and flowers blooming, movement or still of things, and anything else you can visually observe around you. Do not spend time thinking about these things – simply acknowledge what you see.

Notice Sounds

Notice the sounds that drift in. What can you hear? Do you hear birds chirping? Traffic? Other voices?

Name the noise and let go of whether you find the noise pleasant or unpleasant.

Awareness of Smell

Now turn your attention to any smells, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Notice how the mind automatically tries to connect a memory with each smell and how it might remind you of somewhere, something, or someone. Try not to dwell on the memory but focus on the smell.

Physical Sensations

Next, make a point of noticing any physical sensations you experience – from the breeze in the air to how the sun feels on your skin. Again, only acknowledge the sensations without any judgment.

Focus on your Rhythm

Return to observing your stride, the rhythm of your steps. Pay attention to the pressure of each sole as it touches and leaves the ground.

Ending the Meditation

As you come to an end of your walking meditation, stand still. Use this pause to soak up all you noticed and take this awareness into the rest of your day.

You can use your whole walk to slowly make your way through the cues once or as you turn on each new street, start the meditation loop of observations over again. If at any point your mind wanders, re-focus on your gait and your soles hitting the ground with each step, take a deep breath, and simply bring yourself back to the moment to notice your surroundings again.