

Transcript: Mindful Walking

Health Care Provider:

This is a mindful walking exercise which can be carried out in different ways. For example, you can try to be mindful of your walking as you go about your business at a normal walking pace. On the other hand, you can also intentionally slow down your pace of walking, sometimes very slowly at about one step for every 20 to 40 seconds. While that may sound quite odd, it can be a very interesting experience, worth trying at least once. Walking – something many of us take for granted, just like breathing – has many aspects to it, which makes it a great activity for practicing mindfulness. The goal of this mindfulness practice is to increase your ability to be in the present moment and to do so without judgment.

To begin this practice, stand for a moment. Feel the breath moving in and out of your body. Notice your feet making contact with the ground, the ground supporting your feet and your legs supporting the rest of your body. And when you're ready, begin by lifting one leg up and moving it forward to begin walking. If you can walk a bit slower than your normal pace, it may help you attend to the many sensations involved in walking.

With each new step, notice where your foot first makes contact with the ground. What part of your foot first makes contact with the ground? Notice how more of the foot gradually makes contact with the ground over time. Be aware of how the weight shifts from one part of the foot to many areas of the foot. Over time, as your body moves forward, the weight begins to shift away from the back foot onto the front of the foot. What part of the back foot first leaves the ground? Pay attention to the process of your foot leaving the ground. Notice how the weight shifts from one part of the foot to another and then, as you step with the other foot, the process of taking your weight from one foot to another. There may be sensations such as stretching, bending, tensing, and relaxing at different times. With each step notice all the sensations in your feet as you walk.

As is likely, your mind will wander. You may start thinking about things you see, smell, feel, or hear. You may have memories or thoughts about the future. As those come up, notice them and then, with kindness to yourself, bring your attention back to the physical sensations of walking.

Next bring your attention to your legs. Notice the bending in your knees with each step that you take and then gradually a straightening of the leg at the knee. Spend some time noticing the bending that occurs at the hips with each step that you take. Notice the muscles that work to pull and push your legs forward. Notice your leg lifting and being put down with each step. While you continue walking for the next minute or so, notice the changes in your legs as you take each step; and notice any other physical sensations you have as you walk.

Now bring your attention to your whole body as you walk. Notice any shifting or turning in your hips. If walking at a more normal pace, notice your arms as they swing back and forth as you

walk. Notice any slight changes in your body, maybe in the shoulders, neck, or head. Really feel what it is like to walk by keeping your attention on all the physical sensations occurring.

You may continue this practice for as long as you would like while you're walking. You can expand your awareness to your other senses, what do you see, smell, hear, feel, or taste? Try to stick with what is happening right now as you walk and, when your mind wanders, bring your attention back to any of these physical sensations. Mindful walking is a good way to practice mindfulness while taking care of daily tasks at home, at work, or in other settings. Building your ability to stay in the present moment with this and other mindfulness exercises may reduce stress and improve your sense of well-being.