

# Mindful Walking



Walking is a great form of movement that can be used not only for exercise but also as a way to increase your mind/body awareness. What is mindful walking? By using awareness of the mind/body connection you can increase the quality of your walking on many different levels. Think of walking as a form of yoga, meditation or tai chi. While walking you can focus on your body

position, alignment, posture, breathing, movements, fluidity and awareness. Each time you walk you can turn inward and outward allowing new thoughts and challenges to arise. By using walking as a way to balance the mind, body and spirit you will not only get physically fit but also improve your whole life.

## **The following are a few keys to mindful walking:**

**Identify your intention.** When performing any type of mindful practice you need to identify your intention. By setting an intention for your walk you are providing focus and motivation. Some examples of intentions could be: to walk for one hour everyday, to reduce stress, to walk outside and spend time in nature or to increase your sense of balance and calm. Your intention can evolve and change but be sure to set one.

**Listen to your body.** Pay attention to the signals your body is giving you while you are walking. Try to identify the source of the signal. For example if you are feeling a cramp in your calf determine if the way you are walking is causing the cramp. Maybe it is the shoes you are wearing or the surface you are walking on. Get rid of the source of the problem and do what you need to do to alleviate the signal (the cramp). Seek professional help if you have tried to identify the problem but can't.

**Choose a daily physical focus of your practice.** The following are a few things you can focus on to improve your walking technique:> **Focus on your posture.** Be sure to maintain correct postural alignment by stacking your shoulders over your pelvis and wrapping your shoulder blades down and back. Pull your abdominal muscles in and up to support your back and help maintain your torso in an upright position. Be sure your heels, knees and hips are aligned while walking. Maintain your head over your spine and do not let it go forward of the body.

**Be light on your feet.** Think of a string pulling your head up towards the ceiling allowing you to step softly and be as light as a feather. Notice that when your heel hits the ground it is very light. The less impact you make the less wear and tear you put on your joints including the knees, hips and back.

**Level your pelvis.** Engage your abdominals by pulling your belly button up and in. This will help prevent the pelvis from tilting forward or back too much. The ideal pelvic position is neutral which is between an anterior pelvic tilt and a posterior pelvic tilt. You do not want the pelvis to hike up when taking a step. You want it to stay parallel to the surface.

**Bend your arms.** This will increase the energy you use while walking. If you want to take a more relaxing walk allow your arms to swing straight by your sides.

**Engage your buttocks muscles while walking and extend your legs behind you.** The buttocks muscles help take pressure off the low back while walking. If they are not engaged low back pain may arise. Using the buttocks muscles allows you to extend the leg behind you more which will decrease the impact on your knees.

**Keep your stride consistent and cadence natural.** Your stride should feel comfortable and not strain or overstretch the lower extremity muscles. If your stride is too long it can put abnormal pressure on the joints. Keep your stride safe by taking shorter, quicker steps. Notice the natural flow of the body to determine your optimal cadence. Cadence is the rate at which your feet hit the ground. Each day you can challenge yourself with varying your cadence dependent upon what the body and mind need that day.

**Focus on your breath.** Do you take short quick breaths? Do you inhale and exhale through the nose or your mouth? Start trying to inhale and exhale through the nose. Then try to deepen your breath by inhaling through the nose and allowing the oxygen to get into the lower lobes of the lungs. The more oxygen you breathe in the more oxygen gets to the muscles and cells of the body. Challenge yourself with trying to slow down your breath.

**Be Consistent and Enjoy the Experience.** Don't let your daily chores and activities distract you from your intention to walk. Make walking a daily priority for your mind/body/spirit balance. Enjoy this daily time alone with just you, your thoughts and your walking shoes.

**Happy Walking!!**