



Walking Meditation

Pick a place to walk back and forth that is private, uncomplicated—one where the walking path can be ten to twenty feet long. If you walk outdoors, find some place secluded so you won't feel self-conscious. If you walk indoors, find a furniture-free section of a room or an empty hallway, so your walking can be relaxed and easy. You don't need to walk in any way that is unusual. No special balance is needed, no special gracefulness. Just plain walking. Perhaps, sometimes, at a slower pace than normal, but, otherwise, quite ordinary.

Begin your period of practice by standing still for a few moments at one end of your walking path. I often discover myself that my entire body is an antenna for sensing the world. I feel warm or cool, I hear sounds, I see what's around me, I feel my whole body standing. Some people like to start by bring attention to the top of the head, then moving the attention along the body through the head, shoulders, arms, torso, and legs, and ending by feeling the sensations of the feet connecting with the earth. Allow the attention to rest in the sensations in the soles of the feet. Its likely to be the feeling of pressure on the feet and perhaps a sense of "soft" or "hard," depending on the surface upon which you are standing.

Begin to walk forward. Keep your eyes open so you stay balanced. I often being with a normal strolling pace and expect that the limited scope of the walk, and its repetitive regularity, will allow my body to settle into a slower pace. It usually does. I think it happens because the mind, with less stimuli to process, shifts into a lower gear. Probably the greed impulse, ever on the lookout for something new to experience, surrenders when it realizes that you aren't going any place.

At a strolling pace, the view is panoramic and descriptive. At a slower pace, the view is more localized and subjective. If we could have running read-outs, like subtitles, of the thoughts that accompany walking, they might look like this:

Strollingpace: "Step...Step...Step...Step...Armsmoving...Headmoving...Feeling happy...Looking...Stopping...Turning...Hearingabird...Stepping...Stepping...Stepping...Wondering whattimeitis... Stepping...Swingingarms...Feelingcool... Looking around for a sunnier walking path ..Moving into sunshine...
Slower pace: "Pressure on feet . . . Pressure . . . Pressure disappearing . . . Pressure reappearing . . . Pressure shifting . . . Lightness . . . Heaviness . . . Lightness . . . Heaviness . . . Hey, now I've got it! Now I'm paying attention . . . Whoops, I've been distracted . . . Starting again . . . Pressure on feet . . . Pressure shifting . . . Lightness ... Heaviness ..Hearing ..."



Slow walking is not better than fast. The point of walking (and the goal of Mindfulness practice) is to notice that things change. Regardless of pace, everything changes. Direct experience of temporality can happen while strolling just as easily as in slow stepping. I like reminding people that the speed-limit guide for mindful walking is: "Select the speed at which you are most likely to maintain attention. Shift up or down as necessary."

Decide how long you will walk before you begin, and try not to look at your watch. If you have a watch that beeps, you could set it. Indoors, you could set the timer on your stove. Walking just to have the experience of walking—not to get somewhere, or to finish—is a pleasure.