



Mindful Living Blog:

Walking Collection

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Introduction

Welcome to the Mindful Living Blog – Walking Collection!

This collection has been designed to bring together a series of articles from the Mindful Living blog, all of which centre on the theme of walking. The articles in this guide provide an introduction and an entry point into this topic, which you can explore in your own time.

Within each article you will find information on the topic, as well as an invitation. We hope that you will find these invitations thought-provoking and use them to engage in your own process of self-exploration and mindful practice. Above all, we hope that this guide will help to inspire you as you progress on your own journey.

This downloadable guide can also be printed. Please feel free to share it with others who you think may benefit from the content it contains.

As always, we really enjoy hearing from our readers and our wider community. Please feel free to share your thoughts and experiences with us. You can connect with us via the website or by emailing anna@dunami-somatics.com.

Happy reading!

Anna and Diana

(www.dunami-somatics.com)

The Benefits of Everyday Walking

A simple walk can offer a range of physical, health and mental benefits. Even better, it doesn't need to be a long or even particularly vigorous walk. Simply walking for 10 minutes every day can be enough to begin to have a positive impact on your health, wellbeing and creativity.



The Physical Benefits of Walking

Walking can be a fantastic way to burn calories and prevent weight gain, whilst also improving your fitness and building up your endurance and stamina over time. Moreover, regular walking can also reduce your risk of coronary heart disease, boost immune function and improve circulation.

It's also a great choice for anyone looking to ease or reduce joint pain. Walking not only helps strengthen muscles, but it also lubricates the muscles that support the joints. In addition, regular walking can be an effective way to improve posture.

The Mental Benefits of Walking

Yet, aside from the physical benefits it offers, walking is also a highly effective and simple tool to support and improve mental wellbeing. Regular walking has been found to help improve mood, increase self-esteem and even reduce feelings of loneliness and social withdrawal symptoms.

Studies have also found that walking can be a highly effective strategy for coping with and reducing anxiety and depression. In particular, walking outdoors, especially in green spaces has been found to be especially effective at reducing negative thinking and boosting positive mental wellbeing.



Walking and Creativity

One of the greatest benefits of walking however, is that it helps to boost creative thinking. Walking itself is a fantastic strategy to use, particularly when you find yourself stuck on a problem. In particular, taking a walk anywhere outdoors has been found to be an effective way to help clear the mind.

As we walk outdoors, be it in a green space or taking a simple walk through a city or the surrounding streets, our mind is open and free to wander. We allow ourselves to be inspired by the things around us and become more receptive to wandering thoughts and solutions to problems we may have found ourselves previously stuck on. The very simple act of walking enables us to become open to a free flow of ideas and possibilities.

As we walk, we also increase the amount of oxygen flow through our body. This, alongside an increase in hormones such as cortisol, help to increase our energy levels. As a result, the very act of going for a walk can have an immediate effect in boosting our energy and improving our mood.

In particular, taking a walk outdoors, away from our desks, study material and screens can be extremely beneficial. It provides us with the opportunity to recharge and reset. A brief 10 to 15-minute walk can help relieve tension you may be unconsciously carrying and allow your mind the freedom to refocus.



Everyday Walking

The beauty of walking is that it only requires a commitment or willingness from you in order to do it. If you are planning on going for a long walk or walking over particularly tricky terrain, then appropriate footwear should be worn. However, in order to feel the benefits of walking, all you need is 10 to 15 minutes every day to get you started.

Try to make walking a habit and part of your daily activities. Schedule in a walking break. If you study or work from home, schedule in a break dedicated simply to walking outdoors. Alternatively, try to find ways to include walking into other activities. For example, walk part of the way to work or walk to the shops. Walk your children to school or meet a friend for a walk instead. You could even go on a regular family walk after school or at weekends or even join a walking group.



Photo by Anna Dako.

An Invitation...

As we begin to think about ways to engage with the outdoors, we invite you to join us in taking a walk. If you have access to a local nature serve, a woodland, park, riverside or canal path, then take a walk in one of these spaces. Alternatively, take a walk around your local neighbourhood. You could even listen to some music if you find this more helpful.

If you find yourself becoming frustrated, irritable or simply stuck, go for a walk. Make a conscious decision to simply pause for 15 minutes, re-energise and refocus. If you can, try to make walking a regular part of your weekly schedule. Find opportunities to walk and make taking a stroll an enjoyable and fun family activity that you can all participate in together.

Allow your mind to wander freely during your walk and be open and receptive to inspiration along your route. Take the time to simply notice the impact it has upon you, your mood, your creativity and your physical wellbeing.

Outdoor Barefoot Practice

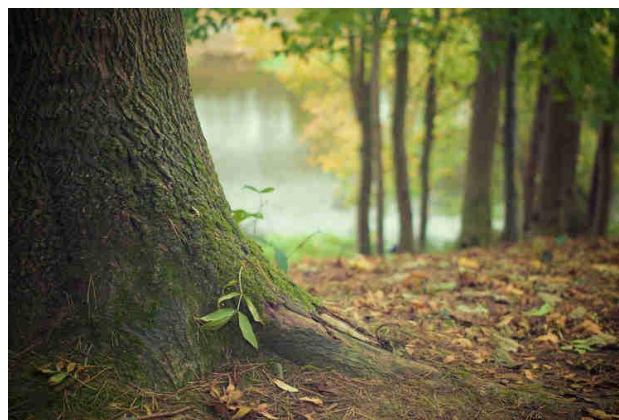
The benefits of 'earthing' are numerous for both your physical body as well as your wellbeing. When you engage in a mindful practice, such as yoga, meditation or somatic movement practice, doing so barefoot opens up a new world of opportunities and experiences. In this article, we invite you to take your barefoot practice outdoors.

Mindful Practice Outdoors

Engaging in outdoor practice may be a new experience for you, particularly if you live in a colder or wetter climate. Outdoor practice may have been something you've considered but not felt confident doing before. Or perhaps it is part of your regular practice already?

Whichever stage you are at, take some time this week to focus specifically on your feet and how the sensation of being barefoot outdoors affects you, not only physically, but also emotionally and mentally.

Ideally, you want to find a space outdoors where you can relax and spend some quality time engaging mindfully with the experience. This may be your garden, the beach, the woods... the choice is yours. If you're new to being barefoot outdoors, aim to spend only about 15 minutes barefoot to begin with and increase the amount of time as you become more familiar and experienced with it.



If you regularly spend time doing somatic movement practice, yoga, martial arts or any other type of practice, challenge yourself to take the practice or training outdoors. You could even

do of the [audio guide practices](#) outdoors. If you normally use a mat, aim to do your practice off the mat and directly on the Earth. Make sure that the area you are practicing in is safe before starting.

The key is to bring your awareness to the feet. Use your breath to guide you. Make sure that you explore the whole of the foot, from the ball of the foot, right through to the edges of the feet and the toes. As you move into each posture or take each step, allow yourself a moment to simply note which part of your foot you are using or placing weight on. How does it feel? What impact does this have on your whole psycho-physical body?



Photo by Anna Dako.

Explore doing your practice on different textures. How does it feel when you practice on grass compared to sand? How is moss different to a woodland floor, covered in soil, fallen leaves and twigs? In what way does a pebbled beach differ to smooth, flat rocks? Does the angle of the terrain you are practicing on affect your balance?

How does your foot react to each texture? Does your foot sink willingly, surrendering into the earth, or do your toes curl protectively? Is your weight predominantly placed on the front part of your foot or are you sinking into the outer edge of your foot in an attempt to stabilise your balance?

Explore the same terrain on different days. Compare how it feels to be barefoot on a warm, dry day in comparison to a wet or cold day. How does the temperature affect the surface and terrain? How does this in turn affect your practice?

Reflect

It's important to remember that the length of time you engage in barefoot practice is unimportant, but rather the level and quality of your engagement is what matters most.



Photo by Anna Dako.

Take some time, during or after your practice, to reflect on how the different terrain and textures affected you and your practice. Note, not only the physical impact, but also the mental and emotional impact too. Was there a particular type of terrain you connected to more deeply? Was one type of texture more inviting and relaxing? Why?

If you normally engage in journaling, this is a great time to do it. Alternatively, you might take the time to engage in some creative or reflective responses in any form of your choosing.

An Invitation...

We invite you to engage in some mindful practice whilst barefoot outdoors. Whether you practice somatic movement practice, yoga, meditation or any other type of training or practice, including martial arts, take it outdoors. Explore different textures and terrains.

The Benefits Of Walking Barefoot

From improved balance, a more natural gait and strengthened muscles to pain relief and reduced stress and anxiety, walking barefoot has been found to provide a range of health and wellbeing benefits. We explore the concept of “earthing”, the benefits of barefoot walking and ways in which we can engage with it in our daily lives.

What Is “Earthing”?

Many people already engage in barefoot walking, but this tends to be mainly limited to their homes. The practice of walking barefoot outdoors on a natural surface, such as grass, soil, sand or moss is often referred to as “earthing” or “grounding”. This is because the act of walking barefoot outdoors allows us the opportunity to reconnect with our natural environment, whilst also offering us the opportunity to (re)ground ourselves and engage in some wellbeing practices.



The Benefits Of Walking Barefoot

There are a range of benefits, both physical and for our wellbeing, which are associated with walking barefoot.

- **Restoring our natural gait** – engaging in regular barefoot walking can help to restore our walking pattern to its natural gait. Depending on the type of shoe that we wear, our walking

pattern is disrupted and changed. The impact of this is felt throughout the body, not only in our feet. Walking barefoot provides our feet with the opportunity to strengthen and fully use all the muscles and tendons in the feet, which might have been prevented from being fully used and may be weakened as a result, from the shoes we wear in our daily lives.

- **Improved foot positioning** – as well as increased strength, walking barefoot also enables us to develop better control over the positioning of our feet. This is especially important when considering the position of the foot as it strikes the ground. Walking barefoot enables us to more carefully consider what part of the foot we are (or are not) using effectively. As a result of improved positioning, we will also be able to develop better balance and even improve our posture as a result.

- **Improved body mechanics** – barefoot walking is a fantastic way to improve our proprioception, which is our awareness of not only the position but also the movement of the body. As such, we can gain better awareness of our whole body in space and how we move. Improved awareness and mechanics of the foot will also impact on the rest of our joints, helping particularly to improve the mechanics of the ankle, knee and hip joints. Consequently, this will all contribute towards better control and use of our body and can help reduce pain in the joints of the lower body and lower back.



Photo by Anna Dako.

· **Improved strength in the feet and legs** – an improved walking gait and more considered foot positioning will also help to strengthen the muscles, not only in the feet, but also in the legs. In turn, this will help to support our lower back, leading to a reduction in lower back pain. As well as strengthening the muscles, barefoot walking also helps to strengthen the ligaments in the feet and ankles and can help to improve the range of motion of these joints.

· **Pain relief** – by improving our balance and developing stronger muscles, we can help to ease some of the negative forces and pressures incorrect walking can place upon our bodies and our joints in particular. As a result, barefoot walking can help to alleviate pain and inflammation. It also offers relief from a range of foot ailments which are associated with wearing ill-fitting shoes, including bunions and hammertoes.

· **Stress relief and improved sleep** – undertaking some regular barefoot walking affords us the possibility to spend some time reconnecting with nature. As a result, we are able to engage in some mindful practice. The very simple act of walking barefoot on a natural surface can help us to feel more relaxed, reduce feelings of stress and anxiety and subsequently, help us to sleep more soundly.

Risks To Be Mindful Of

For the most part, walking barefoot is a safe practice to engage in. However, when walking outdoors it's important to be mindful of the type of terrain we are walking on. It's important to look out for any sharp objects or rough patches (including glass) which can cause injury. Similarly, be aware of whether the terrain is wet or especially smooth, in order to prevent slips and falls. Temperature is also important. If the ground is quite cold, it may be worth limiting the amount of time spent barefoot and build this up slowly over time.



The feet need time to develop strength and muscle, so it's important not to over-exert ourselves to begin, as well as to avoid injuries. Remember to always check the feet thoroughly after walking barefoot outdoors for any injuries which might have been sustained, including cuts or wounds. If you have, make sure that you thoroughly clean and treat these to prevent infections. This is especially important if you suffer from diabetes.

Begin Walking Barefoot

The best thing about walking barefoot is that it does not require any equipment. To begin with, start by spending only 15 minutes per day walking barefoot. As your muscles strengthen, you can extend the length of time you walk barefoot. If you don't already, begin by initially walking barefoot indoors. Simply notice how it changes the way you walk. Observe your foot placement and how it affects your balance.

You can then move on to walking barefoot outdoors on some safe, familiar surfaces, such as grass, soil or sand. Again, observe and note any changes to the way you walk. If you feel any pain or experience any discomfort, stop. Take a pause or restart again another day.

Finally, you might also want to consider going barefoot as part of an activity. For example, you could try doing some yoga, meditation or martial arts outdoors in bare feet. You could also go barefoot whilst following one of Anna's [audio guides](#).



An Invitation...

We invite you to spend some time walking barefoot. Whether that is simply spending time being barefoot within your own home, walking barefoot in your garden or local park, going for a barefoot walk along the beach or even taking a barefoot stroll through your local nature reserve.

Remember to start slowly, with only 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Take the time to engage mindfully with the experience. Notice how it feels to be barefoot. Which parts of your feet are you using? Where is your weight placed? Notice the movement of your feet as you take each step. Which part of your foot strikes the ground first?

Take some time to pause and try doing some simple balancing exercises. How does being barefoot impact upon your ability to balance? Can you distribute your weight equally throughout all areas of your feet? How do different terrains or surfaces affect your walk and balance?



Slowing Down Through Walking

For many people, one of the key changes to have emerged from the periods of lockdown was the sense of slowing down. Despite the challenges faced during the pandemic, this calmer, slower way of living was one element which increasing numbers of people hoped to carry forward into their lives as we moved forwards.

Life is both fast and slow paced. The key is to identify when we need to slow down and seize the opportunity to do so. As a result, we are better placed to lead more balanced, healthier lives. Luckily, there are simple steps we can each take to incorporate some slow movement into our daily routines.



Photo by Anna Dako.

The Slow Movement

The slow movement is a cultural initiative. It began originally as the slow food movement in Italy in 1986, as a protest to MacDonald's opening its first outlet in Rome. The movement then grew over time to encompass slow travel.

At its core, slow movement promotes a shift in focus from busy, fast-paced lifestyles, towards a calmer, more intuitive and reflective way of life. Ultimately, it aims to emphasise connection – connection between people and culture, connection to food, connection to the environment and connection to families.

Engaging In Slow Movement

Slow travel is not simply about forms of travel, but is instead about mindset and creating a new relationship to your surroundings. The key to slow travel is simply to slow down. Rather than aiming to explore many places in a limited amount of time, the focus lies instead on exploring one small area thoroughly, allowing yourself to become fully immersed in it and experience it as fully as possible. The philosophy underpinning the movement is that this approach of quality over quantity will enable you to form a stronger connection to your surroundings.

One way to engage in slow travel is to use alternative forms of travel. In the case of long-distance travel, use of public transport, especially trains, is recommended over the use of aeroplanes. However, in terms of shorter distances or local travel, cycling and walking are especially good ways to engage with your local area.

Incorporating Slow Movement Into Our Daily Lives

One simple way to build slow travel into our everyday life is to walk. Many more people and families have engaged in a daily walk together as a family than were doing so prior to the pandemic. Take the time to enjoy your walk, to appreciate the landscape and your surroundings as you go and allow yourself to truly connect with it. Notice small details around your local area that you may have missed if you had been rushing to a set destination.

If you are taking a walk with your family, allow yourselves to take your time. Allow your walk to be unhurried and embrace the opportunity to connect with each other as well. Make time to stop and notice or explore different plants or architectures and share these moments with one another.



Slow movement places great emphasis on connection to food and culture. Another simple way to build this into your daily life is to spend more time in your local area. Rather than driving to a shop, walk or cycle instead. Try taking a different route to your destination, so you learn more about the local area.

Similarly, try to shop in your local shops and wherever possible, aim to buy local produce. Not only does this allow you to connect with your local area, but you will also be contributing towards the growth of the local economy, as well as reducing pollution.

Walking Meditation

Another way to engage in slow movement can be through the practice of walking meditation. Walking meditation focuses on the simple act of walking itself. Rather than walking to a specific location, you instead use the breath to clear your mind and focus only on the sensation of walking and of your body's movements.

Walking meditation can take place anywhere, even in busy cities. However, walking somewhere in Nature has been found to help improve mood and wellbeing. The key is to allow yourself to ignore distractions, simply devoting your attention to the act of walking.



An Invitation...

We invite you to take some time to slow down and walk. Whether alone or with your family, take a short walk through your local area. Perhaps you can explore a new route or even try to walk to an outdoor space (such as a park or woodland) you haven't been to before, or would usually drive to. Take your time to notice your surroundings as you travel.

If you enjoy meditation or are in need of some time to reconnect with yourself, why not try a walking meditation? Start with a simple 10-minute walk. Focus on the breath and as you walk, begin to slowly widen your awareness. Notice the different sensations in your body, but pay particular attention to your feet and how they feel as you take each step. Keep your pace slow, remaining attentive to your body's sensations throughout. Remain present and engaged to each individual step and moment.

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