

# Taking a “Noticing” Walk

Objective: To bring awareness to the present moment by taking a walk outside and noticing your environment using all of your senses.

## **You Should Know**

One key component of mindfulness is being aware not just of what’s going on inside you (thoughts, feelings) but also what’s going on outside of your body and mind. While the breathing, body scan, and progressive muscle relaxation exercises are aimed at increasing your internal awareness in a nonjudgmental, accepting manner, taking a mindful walk is a bit different.

These days, more and more people are walking around outdoors while looking down at their phones, whether it’s at the beach, the lake, the mountains, or just around the neighborhood. We’re wired up all the time. Studies even show that looking at our phones constantly is changing our brains to be more active, seeking the next exciting stimulus, scrolling from thing to thing to thing, never really stopping to notice.

Mindful walking in a beautiful environment is ideal for waking up the senses and noticing what’s around us. We don’t always have access to a beautiful environment, though, so taking a mindful walk in a noisy city environment can be a good exercise as well. The idea is to give yourself the experience of shifting your perspective outward, while remaining connected to your body, your thoughts, and your feelings.

**What To Do**

Go for a walk outside by yourself for a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes. (In cold weather, you might choose a museum or library.) Turn your phone off. Notice any sounds, really tuning in to everything you can hear—sounds up close, sounds at a medium distance, sounds far away. Take it all in. Notice what you feel in your body when you do this, without judgment and with acceptance.

As an alternative to a “listening” walk, you might choose to notice the smells in your environment. How many different smells can you notice? What smells pleasant (for example, a flower)? What smells unpleasant (for example, car exhaust, a skunk)? Notice what you feel in your body when you do this.

Noticing what you see is another type of mindful walk. Notice colors, shapes, sizes, and contrasts. Look up to the sky. Look down to the ground. Take it all in, consciously. Notice what you feel in your body when you do this.

If you experience some anxiety at being outdoors and opening up your senses, reassure yourself that nothing bad is happening. You could do a simple exercise that will help focus your mind and calm your body, such as identifying everything in your environment that is red, or green, or another color. Tell yourself everything will be OK. Or repeat your self-compassionate statements as you walk. Congratulate yourself for trying.

When you get home, record the sounds, smells, and sights in as much detail as you can remember, and what it was like for you. Be creative. Do what feels good for you.

<b>When and where you practiced</b>	<b>For how long?</b>	<b>What did you notice?</b>	<b>How did it feel?</b>

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

How could you use this exercise in your life to reduce anxiety and stress?

---

---

---