

Instructions for Walking Meditation - transcript from Youtube recording Feb 2023.

This the background material and instructions for the Wise Body walking meditation group.

I'll start by paying respect to the first nations peoples who've walked this land for tens of thousands of years, and to their continuous culture and custodianship of country. For my location that is the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and the Darkinjung people in New South Wales.

Purpose: the aim of this meditation is to train the mind, to become more skilful with moving between (or altering) states like concentration, acceptance, or quiet. Note we are not aiming for a certain STATE but for a certain effort.

We are definitely not trying to “empty” the mind or achieve enlightenment. Nor is our aim solely to get calm, but to balance calm (not sleepy) with alert (not alarmed).

We are focusing awareness on sensation to keep our attention in the present. You may find that your mind settles as you follow the process, but you are not striving for that because you are busy meditating.

Why bother with this training? We spend much of our lives in auto-pilot and this is useful, efficient, and consistent; essential for our functioning. However when we want to **grow or change or make a choice** we have to break out of that.

More meditation Benefits I've seen include:

- Presence: leads to decreased worry, decreased regret
- Awareness of my self: leads to the ability to make a choice
- Equanimity: decreased judgement of self and others and the world leads to peace

I'm Mags Sheridan. I'm a coach and teacher in embodiment which means connecting mind and body — for dramatic life changes.

My embodiment exploration group is called Wise Body because a Wise Body is what you have (not just a brain), and it's easy to ignore it in our usual life. We're here now because this wisdom - including intuition and emotion and also intellect — is more accessible in the quiet stillness.

Walking meditation is great for breaking out of auto-pilot for the same reason that seated meditation often works with the breath. Because these functions are partially automatic and partially directed, we can use them to develop this extremely useful skill of choosing not to be on auto for brief periods.

Also common between breathing and walking: it uses the body, it shows a cycle, it's often available for practice.

The same things are true for walking and its simplicity and adaptability make it perfect for a meditative activity. Developing these mental skills while doing a normal daily activity makes it easier to call upon those skills when you need them.

I've mentioned embodiment a couple of times so far and you might be scratching your head. It doesn't sound like it goes with meditation yeah?

The term Embodiment includes a large number of related concepts related to the connection between the physical and the mental. In today's exercise we are doing somatic work — quite literally using our physical bodies — and we are developing emotional or cognitive abilities. We are connecting the body and the brain. I've a longer video on Youtube introducing Embodiment that explains this in more detail.

Embodied meditation then. I've identified five things that make Wise Body Meditation different from how you might've done it in the past.

- 1 - body and mind together and in this earth reality.
- 2 - meditating on body awareness
- 3 - permission to be comfortable in your body while meditating
- 4 - use of postures or gestures to accompany the practice

5 - combining meditation and movement

(There's a longer video about that list too. The main point for you to take away is that this might not be like other meditation you've done.)

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Let's talk about **how it's done**.

How to do walking meditation: allow the body to walk, and observe.

Allow means you aren't directing your foot to do one thing and your knee to do something at the same time, you're just walking, and then you can notice your foot and your knee and everything else. However your body **wants to walk** is fine.

The one thing you'll want to direct is speed. Move **slowly**. A slower pace will allow you to observe more. While it is possible to move fast with perfect awareness, it takes a lot of practice. To start, slow your pace enough that you can become aware of the different parts of the cycle of each step. Don't go so slowly that you can't balance or it's otherwise distracting.

Observe means to notice what the body is doing, and to see if you can "see" and feel more over time. Sensation keeps us in the present because it is ever changing.

If you think about the five senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling are mostly about what's external; feeling can be internal too. The external will be prominent in your mind at first: Things we see are usually most prominent so keep your eyes down and softly unfocused to diminish the importance of that sense. Sounds: your footsteps, the people around you, the wind through the trees, traffic passing, birds calling. Any smells including your own body, the plants, exhaust; the taste of the inside of your mouth.

As time passes you'll notice things on the skin, the boundary between the external and the internal: notice the interactions at that interface

like air and touch. As you get the idea of noticing, prioritise the **inner** sensing. The feeling of your feet against the ground may be first, then the movement of your limbs, then tension in a muscle, stretch of skin, gurgle of belly, heartbeat. For most of us, this is new territory, so be patient with yourself as you learn more body awareness.

What else? In addition to sensation, how about rhythm?

- For each foot: Heel - flat - ball - lift
- For each step: beginning - middle - ending - the pause between
- For each pair of steps?
- The movement of your arms or trunk or head: cross pattern
- The way your steps change making a turn
- Rhythm of breath and steps

There's also a large category of things you might notice about yourself during the practice. Take a note and then move on; don't analyse it now.

To summarise, our assignment is to be aware of sensation in our bodies, in a neutral way, and to gently dismiss other thoughts, and to gently return when lost.

Remember: The instruction to observe does NOT mean to assemble yourself a to-do list of things to investigate and then tick each box. The broad range of options offered is meant to tickle your imagination and **open you to the possibilities.**

Also beware of adding judgements to your observations. Your assignment is to BE a person walking and to be aware of your self and its walking. One of the things you'll be aware of is when you aren't aware: that is, when you are lost in thought, and you will gently redirect yourself back.

This quality of paying attention is called mindfulness. Mindful walking is where the primary activity is walking and it's done with a quality of mindfulness. Start here, as a gateway to walking meditation. Over time let the work on attention, focus, and distraction become your primary

activity, and the walking itself recedes as “just” the posture. At the same time the repeated and continued attention on it keeps the walking and the sensations it creates in the foreground. Paradox.

Return to observing every time you notice you aren't. Aim for just a little more observant, or a little shorter time til you come back.

Be forewarned: It will be hard to keep your mind on body awareness. That's why we practice it!

- When you're distracted, naming and counting can help. Give your brain more work to do.
- When your mind is busy, telling yourself you'll come back to that thinking later can help. And naming/counting works well here too.
- If you're getting into a trance, stand up taller, look up and around. If you need more: “ground” deeply.

To ground means to connect your body with gravity and the earth. Stop. Stand and rearrange your legs hips etc to make as stable posture as you can. Feel the floor, chair, ground etc. Feel gravity via your weight against this. As you're breathing, you might push your weight against the ground, bounce a bit, or touch the surface you're on with your hands.

Most important thing to do when you notice you are distracted: forgive yourself immediately, and start again.

When focus is easy, try for more constant attention or deeper or subtler or slower or wider. [But, continue to focus, not to think about ways to alter it.] Might also do the narration techniques mentioned for distraction.

It's not just okay to be bored, it's great for you. Boredom in your thinking mind means your attention can drop in to your body and your intuition can be heard, and then your subconscious work on solutions will be revealed in an a-ha moment later on. Boredom is good.

We aren't using any background music even though doing so might assist our concentration. Instead, relying on internally generating this state in the midst of silence, and in the midst of traffic/other people/etc, reinforces our own innate agency and capacity.

When you find yourself in analysis*, save that for later, and come back to body awareness.

* worry / regret / longing / planning

Can you experiment with different ways of walking?

Yes. (Walking backwards is particularly interesting emotionally!)

Caution: Be careful of encouraging thinking to overtake noticing with laboratory mode or Physio mode or subtle stretching mode or I'm going to get an A in this meditation mode.

Practical Safety considerations: please do keep your eyes open, and enough awareness outside of you that we don't crash into each other.

Lastly, there's no talking between the bells.

If you feel the urge to speak to someone, perhaps a glancing smile at them, and then return your soft gaze to the ground or the horizon.

Remember we are in a group but each of us is having an experience that internal, and entirely individual.

I won't be speaking either.

In this class, you aren't just learning how to meditate while walking.

There's a higher aim which is personal development. This embodied meditation practice means that you learn some things about your current state, and about your power to shift that. You can learn not to judge something that's happening. Anyone think that might be useful in like every single area of life? Please, remember the aim is not to get zen. A tiny bit more and a tiny bit more.

I'd love to work with you on this stuff in person in Sydney or online anywhere. This link <https://magssheridan.com/unstuck/> goes to a

special offer to get unstuck on one question in a single session of online embodiment coaching.

I'll close with a story which is my testimonial for the practice of walking meditation. The first time I taught this class in Centennial Park, the class was at 9am and at 7 I was at the emergency vet with my dog who was not using her back legs. She is my love and at a certain point I was fighting back tears about the Pops and absorbing the stress of the other people there with their beloved pets in pain. Luckily I found out she was going to be okay in time to get a ride over and lead the meetup. I was literally shaking it off, grounding on the grass, and doing breathing exercises in the few minutes before people started to show up. I was able to get it together to lead the practice and then after a while to blend leading it and practicing myself. Towards the end of the twenty minutes, I realised I had actually not worried about my precious little one at all for quite a while.