



Mindful Walking

1. **Bring your meter with you.** Exercise burns carbs and can lower your blood sugar, sometimes, dramatically. Before you begin, check your blood sugar. Whatever, it is, it will likely go down even if you are not running or exercising heavily.
2. **Make sure you have a bottle of water and some snacks.** It's a good idea to bring a small container of peanut or almond butter or a bag of nuts (protein). Celery/carrot sticks, apples, crackers or bread and cheese (carbs/protein)
3. **Make sure you bring a couple candy snacks** (especially if you are T1)
4. **Wear sneakers or walking shoes.** Use foot supports and cotton socks
5. **Periodically check your blood sugar.** Snack as necessary.
6. **Hydrate.** Drinking pure water (not flavored) increases oxygen, energy and focus.

Mindful walking combines the power of movement and exercise with mindfulness, the practice of single point focus. Choose your path and destination. Bring a walking buddy. This walk is silent. The focus is on the sensations of movement, the soft and deliberate stepping and noticing everything there is to notice in your surroundings. Breathing, walking, seeing, and listening are the mindfulness actions you are practicing.

The benefits are improved circulation and insulin sensitivity, flexibility, and cardiovascular conditioning, physical strength and endurance. No need to hurry. In fact, mindfulness means becoming aware of the pace (*slow*), attitude (*patience*) and thoughts (*let them go!*) Just a little activity can go a long way.

The Strategy

Begin by slowly placing one foot in front of the other, deliberately and slowly. Keep your eyes lowered at first; watching each and every step you take, slowly, very slowly.

Inhale as you raise your left foot, exhale as you lower it. Then inhale as you raise your right foot, and exhale as you lower it.

Continue for about five minutes, occasionally looking up to see what is on the path or walkway before you. Depending on your feet, and any neuropathy you may have, you may wish to walk on an even, paved walkway. But if it suits your condition, you can also choose to walk on a forest path.

Be aware that uneven surfaces may affect your balance, even if you are walking slowly. After about five minutes, you are ready to pay closer attention to your surroundings. Your feet and your mind are following a repetitive rhythm, so you can now look around you. Begin to notice what you see.

Begin to notice what you hear and what you smell. Notice the sensations in your body. Are you comfortable? Are the sounds around you pleasant or unpleasant? Notice how easy it may be to label whether you like or dislike a sound, a scent.

Return your attention to your inhaling and exhaling and stepping. Do your feet care whether a sound or a scent is pleasant or unpleasant? Bring all of your attention to your feet, moving and your breath.

Continue to your destination.

Check your blood sugar.

Do you need water?

Do you need a snack?

Which of the snacks you have brought serves your blood sugar best?

When you are ready to return to your starting point, repeat all of the mindfulness practice you have learned just now.

Diabetes is about developing mindfulness, patience, strength, flexibility, determination, self-compassion and endurance. You have it all!

A Mindful Walking Story

At the Women's Diabetes Retreat in October 2018, we walked to the upper meadows at the retreat center. Here is a "replay" of what took place. Some of the women chose to walk barefoot.

There are several paths by the meditation hall. I had chosen one that led into the woods and the ledge above the river that runs through the property. It is well maintained and leads to a stone crossing before leading up into a beautiful meadow.

We began by lining up at the trail head, allowing the distance of the space of one person in front of each walking meditator. The women did a brief relaxation breath to bring us all into a slow diaphragmatic breathing pattern. They checked their meters. They adjusted their backpacks with supplies.

“From this moment on, I said, “until we return to the meditation hall, for the most part, this is a silent meditation. Simply, in the beginning, pay attention to inhaling and exhaling, focusing on lifting one foot and setting it down, before lifting the other, and mindfully setting it down. Pace yourself by the pace of the person in front of you. Keep that space between you, adjusting your speed, if you need to. If you have a longer stride, increase the space between you and the person in front of you.”

“If anyone is having difficulty, step out of the line and call my name and wait for me to come to you. The way is self-evident. Otherwise, I will be in the lead. Listen to everything. Feel the sensations of the ground under your feet. Take note of everything you smell. After a while, the pace and the stride and the breathing will come naturally. At that point, whenever it occurs for you, look around as you walk. Experience everything.”

“Oh, one more thing! I walk very, very slowly. If that makes you feel impatient, just ‘hang out’ with your frustration. See what happens when you aren’t trying to get anywhere. Drop the idea that you need to achieve something, or “get somewhere” along the path. ”

We began, the group following me, slowly and in single file as I led them onto a well-worn dirt path. It wound its way through pine trees rising in elevation gently. In areas, a soft moss was growing on the path, muffling the sound of the walkers’ feet. A rich earthy scent rose in the air around us. The trees were motionless, not a sound could be heard.

Further along, we stepped over tree roots that were exposed along the path. Soon we could hear the sound of the stream ahead as we walked along. The sound of birds and crickets filled the air and a breeze from the river rustled the pine needles above us.

The sound of river water rushing over rocks became louder as we walked along the ledge. The sky above was a deep blue without a cloud in sight. The air became cooler, the closer we walked by the river. A squirrel scurried across the path and dashed up a tree.

And now the ledge led downward, a gradual descent that brought us to the river. There was a crossing ahead, made by flat rocks that bridged the stream. One at a time, we crossed.

The rocks were warm and smooth, heated by the sunlight and crafted by the constant wearing away of the surface by the flow of water. One rock was partially submerged, letting each one of us step into a warm puddle of water. We continued onto the other-side of the stream, picking up the path again. Wild flowers grew along the path on this side of the river. One of the women reached down and plucked a bright blue, cone flower and tucked it behind her ear.

Soon we came to a meadow. The path wound its way through the meadow and would eventually come full circle back to the path that led back to the river. We crossed over a muddy area, wet dirt squishing between our toes or onto the bottoms of our sneakers. One of the women sighed. The sound of peepers, small tree frogs, could be heard from the marshy trees by the meadow.

The path led back to the river as we retraced our steps across the stream and onto the pathway to the ledge. Moments later, we were walking silently along the moss covered pathway and a soft wind rose through the trees. We could hear the wind-chimes by the meditation hall as we entered the courtyard. One by one, we entered the meditation hall and took our seats. In silence. After a few moments, I struck the Tibetan Bowl.

“Notice how it feels to be in your body this moment. It may be comfortable, or not. It may be peaceful, or not. Whatever you are feeling, it is simply what you are noticing. When we let ourselves expand who we are, beyond our diabetes, we find we have many more resources to manage living with the experience of diabetes. We are greater than our experience.”