**Mindful Walking**

The majority of our routinized daily movement activities, such as walking and typing, are hardwired into the fast-thinking autopilot (in particular, the basal ganglia, a key structure of Brain 2.0), such that they don’t require any conscious thinking or effort to carry out.

Mindful walking, along with more complex mindful movement practices such as yoga and tai chi, enhance proprioception and interoception by intentionally bringing bodily sensations back into conscious awareness. In mindful walking, we slow the process down and break it apart until it feels like we are learning how to walk all over again. Human beings aren’t born with walking stored in our autopilot, a fact that can be observed by watching toddlers learn how to walk for the first time. When they start, they have no idea how to use their muscles to support and balance their body weight as they move one leg after the other, so they stumble and fall frequently. Each step requires intense concentration and focus. But once they get the hang of it and walk frequently, the movements become automatic, such that walking no longer requires active concentration. Within only a few months, walking becomes a nonconscious activity that they can do on autopilot, which frees up their conscious mind to think about other matters as they walk.

Instructions for Mindful Walking

In mindful walking, you will try to consciously focus your full attention on the sensations of walking, tuning in and observing how your body feels as you walk. Try to walk in silence, because engaging in conversation (or any other form of multitasking) will prompt you to walk in autopilot mode, such that you stop paying attention to your sense of proprioception and interoception. In the beginning, it is best to choose a quiet, safe, secluded path, away from other people and moving vehicles. Some people choose to pace back and forth along a walkway of about ten feet, so they can pay attention to the walking process without a distracting goal of getting anywhere. Since we evolved to walk in autopilot mode so we can multitask, whenever the mind wanders, we tend to slip out of mindful walking back into walking in autopilot mode. As soon as you notice your mind wandering, gently bring your full attention back to the mindful walking practice.

When you begin, it helps to move slowly so you can feel all the micro movements and sensations involved in taking each step. When people start mindful walking, they tend to focus their attention mainly on their feet. After a while, people notice how their entire body is involved in walking (muscles in the back, core, and neck are also flexing when people walk).

Observe how you take each step and all the muscular and skeletal movements involved in walking:

* How do your balance and weight shift?
* With each movement, which parts of your body bear your weight?
* As you move, which muscles contract and which relax?
* Where does your foot strike?
* When does the other foot come up?
* How is your gait? (Neutral, pigeon-toed, or duck-footed?)
* What are your arms doing?
* Where do your eyes look? (Hint: your eyes don’t need to look at your feet to walk mindfully.)
* How is your posture?

Tune in to sense and feel what it is like to be in your body.

* How does being grounded in your body enhance your sensory awareness?
* How does mindful walking affect your sense of presence and connectedness?
* What emotions do you feel?

Try varying your walking rate.

* How does speed affect your ability to walk mindfully?
* With continued practice, can you walk mindfully at your normal speed?

Post-Mindful-Walking Reflection

To further hardwire this learning experience, please take time to write (or think about) your answers to the following questions:

* How was this experience compared to how you normally walk?
* What insights, if any, arose?
* What stood out most to you?
* How can you incorporate mindful walking, or mindful movement in general, into your everyday life?

Quach, Due. Calm Clarity: How to Use Science to Rewire Your Brain for Greater Wisdom, Fulfillment, and Joy (Kindle Locations 5497-5502). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.