

Serenity en route
Expert tips to help you walk your stress away
By Dana Lacey

Boost your mood and fitness level with three relaxing techniques while you walk:

Take it in stride

When your thoughts start to overwhelm you, going for a walk is a cheap and easy way to exercise both mind and body. Start the walk with a long, deep breath – inhale, and then release tension as you exhale. “The best way to block out distractions is to focus on your breathing,” says Simone Riml, a yoga instructor at the YogaBC studio in Vancouver. Your walking posture is important as well: Relax your shoulders, and concentrate on lifting your torso from the hips. “We sit into our hips too often,” she says, “and the hips and the knees bear the brunt of the pressure.” Keep your chin up and look directly in front of you to take the pressure off your neck; imagine a book balanced on your head.

Daily dose

There are numerous benefits to consciously breathing while you're walking, Riml says. “It lifts your mood, improves your digestive system and increases your energy levels, creativity and clarity,” not to mention the physical benefits of walking. Make it part of your daily routine. “Walking in the early morning is a great time to connect with nature because that’s when nature is quiet,” says Andrea Klein, a yoga instructor at the Westcoast Hot Yoga studio in Surrey, B.C. “Have some tea, and go for a walk to energize yourself and set the tone for the whole day.” On the other hand, an evening walk can help you unwind. “Your intention while night walking is to let go of the day with each step,” Klein says. “At the end of the walk, you will be clear and open, and ready to receive the beauty of the next day to come.”

Tune out, tune in

Don’t be afraid to sneak in a refreshing city stroll on your lunch break; block out the sounds of gridlock with an mp3 player full of meditation music, suggests Riml. But don’t always tune out with your headphones. Unplug and listen for sounds you might otherwise have ignored: a bird, a busker, some bus-stop chatter. “Most people walk, and they’re in their heads, worrying, thinking, analyzing or obsessing about something in their lives,” says Lynn Roberts, the Director of Operations at Innergy Corporate Yoga Inc. in Vancouver, B.C. “Very few of us know how to turn off that inner voice and just enjoy the moment.” When walking, pay attention to your surroundings and take in everything you see, she says. “We often overlook so much. Listen to the sounds, smell the smells, take a deep breath and enjoy where you are.” Most of all, don’t give that nagging voice in your head a chance to speak up.

First published in Chatelaine.com’s June 2009 issue.
© Rogers Publishing Limited