Walking My Worries Away

This week it’s above 90 degrees where I live. I must admit I cut my walking time down from an hour to 30-45 minutes, depending on how many more steps I need to hit 10,000. My counter helps me to keep track, and I include walking the dog and walking at work toward my overall steps.

I am overweight, and there’s talk that I should do more strenuous exercise. Unfortunately, I’m waiting for gyms to open up. But the good thing about being overweight is that with every step I’m walking extra weight down the sidewalk.

These other benefits to walking have helped me to make it a daily practice: I meet my neighbors, it’s not as hard on your knees as running, and on hot days I can work up a good sweat. There are generally two types of walking I do, and they’re not actually based on form or even lowering my body weight.

The first type is walking in silence, enjoying a bit of mindfulness. I pay attention to everything around me, from the hopping bunnies to the smell of smoke from the fire pit in my apartment complex. I notice whether the air is humid or giving me a cold breeze. I am completely focused on that moment.

This form of walking also makes me seem much friendlier to my neighbors, who may be less likely to talk to people with headphones in. I’ve found people I pass every day: children bouncing over the concrete on their bikes, the runners who don’t seem to slow down even on 95-degree days, and the people studiously watering their lawn who sometimes spray me with a little mist, cooling me in a way that keeps me walking a bit longer. These people have become more consistent to me than even my friends during these times, and it shows the good in a world that carries on.

This positive atmosphere also helps me practice walking meditation, which is a form that works well for me, as I have a hard time sitting still. I line up my mantra with my steps and my breathing, and it feels like I can be one with myself without spending an hour sitting on a pillow I don’t find comfortable. Don’t get me wrong, I practice sitting meditations too, but for me personally this is a better fit.

The other form of walking I do takes place while listening to something. Rather than being caught up in the moment around me, I get absorbed in the joy of learning. Some people may use this time to unwind, often with music, but I prefer to feel as if I am gaining knowledge out of it. I listen to books from my library’s app, hour-long podcasts that push me to keep on getting it all done in one walk, and mindfulness exercises which I often stop after a short one and try to practice in my walking.

This habit helps me feel like my walks are worthwhile, even if they don’t make me lose weight. I sometimes listen to books on various spiritual topics, podcasts on writing and mental health, and short meditations that give me time to practice. I find that spending some time with a learning tool while I walk brightens my entire day, as I take time to think about what I learned while making dinner, taking a shower, or getting ready to sleep for the day. I try to vary what I listen to, but some things will always interest me. Find what interests you, and your walks will be that much better.

I find for me it’s best to engage in both types of walking. I can notice how the suburb I walk through is different day to day, and I can hear bikers coming behind me. I also can get deep into my thoughts, and come out a better person. Perhaps I’m not shedding the pounds overnight, but making steps to be healthier improves me every day I partake in it. When my apartment complex’s gym reopens, I may go there, but for now these walks are perfect.