



Mental Health Matters: The Joy of Walking

We are so often told that walking is good for us but it isn't always easy to find the energy or inspiration to do it. Weather will play a factor as it's easy to stay indoors when it's raining outside. Do you



remember how much you enjoyed splashing around in rain puddles as a child? Why not have a go now? Don your wellies and raincoat and off you go. Come rain or shine, walking has lots of plus sides.

Sometimes people need to have a purpose for a walk with an end goal - perhaps a walk to a pub (when allowed of course) or simply to get from A to B. There's nothing wrong with that and if you can walk rather than take a car or

bus journey that's got to be good for the environment too!

Walking can be so much more than that though. The physical benefits can be enormous. The simple rhythm of steps can help to regulate your heart rate and lower your blood pressure. Your muscles will be strengthened from that simple action of progressing from footstep to footstep as well as improving your balance. Many diseases including diabetes have their risks reduced through walking as well as increased protection from heart problems and improved immunity. Your weight may be reduced by walking too in conjunction with healthy eating.



Contemplation in natural surroundings can be very grounding and help you to be more 'in the moment'. Listening to the birdsong, simply enjoying the sound or trying to identify the bird, can help to distract you from negative thoughts. Gaze at a flower and wonder at the power of nature.

Many creative people find that a walk outdoors will help shape their ideas by getting away from their normal environment. A musician might be inspired by hearing a bird song or a rustle in the trees or perhaps the crunching of leaves.

Sudden movement by an animal will be an added distraction. A friend walking on Exmoor in the drizzle suddenly came across a herd (or mob!) of 39 deer! What an amazing experience. Solo walking means that you will be less likely to disturb animals and be able to enjoy nature at its best.



Not everyone is confident to walk alone and, anyway, walking is a great social activity. Be it one to one with a friend or in an organised group. It's really good to cover some ground together whilst having a natter.

A simple walk from your front door can bring enormous pleasure. Try to notice the small changes from day to day, week to week or month to month as you walk the same route. It is always different in some way.



Until you start to look for these differences you may well think it is boring to walk the same route time and again. When life is difficult for various reasons, it can help to really focus on something that can take you away from other thoughts.

Nature has a wonderful way of helping a problem seem less significant.

Here are some helpful sources and resources you may like to use: A guide to Bradninch Walks (13 walks around Bradninch)

<https://www.bradninchtogether.org.uk/bradninch-walks> then

- For group walking <https://www.ramblers.org.uk>
- For people wanting to start walking who have struggled with health problems <https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk>
- The positive affect of walking <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27100368/>

Take care,
with all good wishes from
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