



Make it a mindful hike

As you begin your hike, take time to quiet your mind so you can focus on your surroundings.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a known expert in mindfulness-based stress reduction, defines mindfulness as an “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” Mindfulness can help us stop our mind’s constant chatter and help us center our thoughts to be truly in the moment.

Mindful breathing is a helpful step in quieting your thoughts and transitioning into mindfulness. One technique is to take 10 slow, deep breaths. Focus on breathing out as slowly as possible until your lungs are completely empty, then allow them to slowly refill by themselves. Notice the sensations of your lungs emptying and refilling. Notice your shoulders gently rising and falling.

Using your five senses is a very important part of mindfulness. Consider the **54321** practice. Describe to yourself five things you can see. Use as much detail as you can. Then describe to yourself four things you can hear, three things you can feel, two things you can smell and, finally, one thing you can taste.

Now, consider some ideas specific to mindfulness in nature and apply them to your hike.

1. **Have an attitude of gratitude.** Explore your surroundings and direct your senses to the present moment with openness, curiosity and flexibility. Take time to look closer or in unexpected places like a drop of rain or a fallen leaf, or the broader view of the trees, trail and sky. Allow your mind to fully appreciate the sights and sounds of nature as the gifts that they are. If you get distracted, be kind to yourself as it is normal, but then gently redirect your awareness to the space around you.
2. **Embrace a vacation mind.** Vacations give us the opportunity to reset and let go of our daily stresses and worries. You don’t have to travel far to access this state of mind and walk like a tourist, even on a local trail. Look for the lovely and welcome the new. Perhaps the sky has a totally unique cloud formation. Notice the pattern in the bark of a tree, hear the song of a bird for the first time, or smell the scent of decaying leaves.
3. **Tread lightly.** Practice making a serene encounter with the Earth in each step. Notice the sensation of pressure as each foot contacts the ground. Pay attention to the felt sense of the wind or the gentle breeze on your skin. As you swing your arms, enjoy the very subtle flow of air around your fingers.

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