

Mental Wellbeing, Independence, and Personal Control - How A Simple Walk Can Make You Happy

Walking is a wonderful ability which many of us do not appreciate until it becomes too difficult to undertake. Poets, philosophers, artists, scientists, rulers and revolutionaries have all been inspired and fortified by the simple act of walking. The human body has [evolved to walk](#), it's what we're designed to do, and fulfilling this evolutionary niche brings untold satisfaction which we're only just beginning to appreciate. Walking can lift the mood, combat depression, calm the stressed, and soothe the mentally ill. And this is just the act of walking – the ability to get out and interact with the outside world on your own two feet adds to these benefits. So having the ability to walk easily taken from you can be an enormous blow to someone's lifestyle. Luckily, however, [Merry Walker](#) are here to help restore the joys of a simple walk to those who need it.

Walking And Depression

According to [recent research](#) from the University of Stirling in Scotland, walking is extremely good for those suffering from depression. Of course, walking brings all the mood-boosting benefits of [any form of exercise](#) – but there's more to it than that. Walking still lifts mood and combats stress and anxiety even if you can't move fast or far enough to really raise your heart-rate. Something as low-key as a gentle stroll, or even just a potter round the park can leave you with a sense of deep satisfaction and put you in a good mood. Most experts agree that going for a walk is absolutely fantastic for mental wellbeing, no matter what pace you set or how far you go. The reasons behind this are unclear, but there are a few theories being circulated. What is certain is that just getting out for a little wander is absolutely brilliant for you no matter your level of health or fitness – so you need not worry about losing out on the benefits of walking just because you cannot power along at a marching clip.

Sunlight and Serotonin

Anyone who has ever walked on a gym treadmill, facing a mirror, burning calories but going nowhere will have noticed that such an activity does not bring even half the feel-good factor of going for a walk out in the world. Partly this is because the simple act of getting outside is [fantastic](#) for both your mental and physical wellbeing. This is particularly true if you go out on a sunny day. The human brain is very much influenced by the circadian rhythms which tell us when to sleep and when to eat. These rhythms are in turn influenced by the levels of natural light we get to experience. One important component of these circadian rhythms is serotonin – a chemical which is [released](#) when light levels are high. Serotonin is also vital for the maintenance of good mood. People with depression are frequently treated by increasing their serotonin levels, which has had excellent results. A lift in serotonin levels provided by exposure to sunlight gives a natural mood boost which both brain and body will relish.

Walking - The Philosopher's Choice

However, it doesn't have to be sunny for a walk to put you in a good mood. The simple act of walking from place to place has a quite wonderful and not yet fully understood effect upon the mind. Nietzsche said that "all truly great thoughts are conceived while walking", and any dedicated perambulator will know what he meant. The simple act of walking, of moving forward using the feet, for some reason allows the walker to enter a semi-meditative state extremely conducive to clear thought and good mood. Lulled by the rhythm of their footsteps and the passing scenery, the walker finds thoughts passing clearly and cleanly across their minds. This allows those who are troubled or preoccupied with problems to get a sense of perspective and reconnect with themselves.

Independence and Personal Control

Crucially, being able to go for a walk provides a great sense of independence and control. Something as simple as walking to a location of your own choosing, with your own two feet allows the walker to gain psychological independence over their own life and the direction (both literal and metaphorical) that it is taking. It gives them the opportunity to make and fulfil their own decisions, and accomplish something of their own will and under their own steam. The loss of mobility frequently chafes those with walking problems not because of the inconvenience, but because it represents a vital loss of independence and personal life-control. Furthermore, walking allows one to gently interact with one's own body in a manner which is frequently being lost in this age of automated transport. A walk teaches you your physical and mental limits – which are often far higher than you would have expected. This is both liberating and vital for those needing a sense of themselves and some self-control. The correlation between walking, independence, and self-control has long been known. Jane Austen's heroines frequently took long, solitary walks, which highlighted for the Georgian and Victorian readers their independence and ability to move beyond the constraints of their domestic situations. In modern times, [recovering drug addicts](#) are encouraged to take walks. Not only does this help their mental wellbeing in the manner described above, it also gives them a sense of their own capabilities and limits, and allows a degree of control over themselves which is [desperately lacking](#) in their lives under the spell of an addictive substance.

Regaining The Benefits of Walking

Sadly, [not enough people walk these days](#). This is a great shame, as they will really miss this unused ability when it is failing or gone. Anyone who has lost the ability to walk with ease will urge and exhort the couch potatoes to find their feet and head out into the world. However, those who find walking hard but still want to experience the wonderful effects of a stroll need not despair. Mobility aids exist to set them back on their feet and get them back out into the world. Such aids are often a literal lifeline, giving people back their independence, and allowing them to experience the world afresh in the manner for which the human body was designed: walking. Written by Susie Walsh.