A walk on the mild side

Complementary therapist Mandy Bruce explains how to escape from stress

Competing patient and staff expectations can feel overwhelming. Add to that the expectations we place on ourselves to complete tasks perfectly and the pressure can be oppressive.

Stress takes a toll on wellbeing, so, instead of letting the stresses and strains of the day whirl around our heads, we can practise a walking meditation.

Meditation means letting go of preoccupations and respecting the quiet within. If we observe our thoughts coming and going, we can gently acknowledge their presence and let them drift away.

To start with, they will come back. But then let them go again. In this way, we are brought back to the present moment and to ourselves, relinquishing our stress and relaxing along the way.

Meditation is generally undertaken in a sitting position, but walking meditation is a great starting point for a beginner. A single step can be seen as one movement. But after meditating on that movement, you will see that there are at least four movements and that each of these four movements consists of millions of tiny movements. What appears to be one continuous movement is, in fact, a series of movements.

Frame by frame
The effort is to see our movements as closely as a camera would see them, frame by frame, observing the awareness and intention preceding each movement. So pay attention to the process of walking and notice the natural rhythm of the distinct movements involved.

Lift, move and place your left foot and lift, move and place your right foot. Focus on each of these actions one by one, foot by foot.

Become aware of the sensations in your feet. How do they feel as you move? Notice if they are light, warm, tingling. Try not to look at them because it is about sensing from inside. Now do the same with your legs. Do they feel heavy, shaky, cool? Again, do not look. Feel them from within.

When thoughts pop into your head, acknowledge they are there and then let them go. They will creep back to start with, but do not get frustrated. Just bring your attention back to the motion of walking. Be mindful of the moment.

While walking and noting the parts of the steps, you will probably still be thinking. But keep focused on the steps NS

Mandy Bruce is a life coach and therapist. She manages the NHS Employers' campaign to reduce stress in the NHS.