

Culture COUNTS

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The art of practicing 'mindful walking' offers several proven benefits — here's how to begin

Whether you have already found the joys of meditation and mindfulness or are just a little intrigued, then a great place to practice being mindful is when walking. Mindful walking helps to strengthen concentration, makes you more aware, and connects you to the present moment —all while bringing you closer to nature and your body. After mindful walking, you should feel much more clear-headed, more relaxed and even happier and more content.

So how do we actually go about mindful walking you might ask? Here are our three top tips.

1. Focus

Choose comfortable clothing and shoes to wear so they don't become a distraction, pick your route, and head on out. Start with a gentle walk, take a couple of deep breaths in and out and focus on your body, have a scan of it from your toes right up to the top of your head. Which areas feel tight, painful, uncomfortable? Do any areas feel good? How's your energy level? What is the temperature like? Is the wind tossing your

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“WHEN THE MIND IS CALM, WE’RE BETTER ABLE TO FIND PEACE OF MIND AND LIVE A JOYFUL LIFE.”

- DALAI LAMA

INSIDE

If you need to cultivate a spirit of community in your classroom —but do not have a lot of time — check out some effective strategies from instructional coach Randi Downs on Page 5.

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Students in the OCM BOCES Crossroads program at Crown Road Campus made more than 100 lunches for the homeless in Syracuse. Please turn to page 6 for the full story.

WELLNESS COUNTS

Focus on what you hear, see, feel as you mindfully walk

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hair? Can you feel rain on your skin? Listen to your body and find the pace that's going to suit you today.

You can then switch your focus to your outer surroundings, such as the terrain are you walking on. Are your feet crunching through leaves in a woods or swishing through long, wet grass? Or maybe you are in a town or city, aware of other people, cars, smells from restaurants. What noises are around you, bird song or car horns? Immerse yourself in your environment and the exact moment that you are in.

2. Bring yourself back to the moment

If you find your mind wandering off to what's for dinner or what you're going to wear out tonight, don't worry. This is completely normal — your role is to just bring back your thoughts and focus on the present moment. When you first start mindful walking, you may find your mind wanders off easily. Really, don't worry! We call it *practicing* meditation for a reason. Our minds need to practice staying focused and aware.

Some people find that just recognizing their presence in the moment has slipped and re-focusing will work, but other people need a little more. I've heard some say when they notice that their thoughts have gone elsewhere they like to physically stop in their tracks, take a deep breath, and re-focus. You may find you need to do this many, many times, but please don't think that this is a bad thing. If you continue with your mindful walking practice, you will notice these instances becoming less and less.

Don't fall into the trap of giving up at the first hurdle and thinking, "Oh, I just don't think I can do meditation. There really are no right and wrongs with mindfulness and meditation. The more you do it, the easier you will be able to slip into this focused and present way of being.

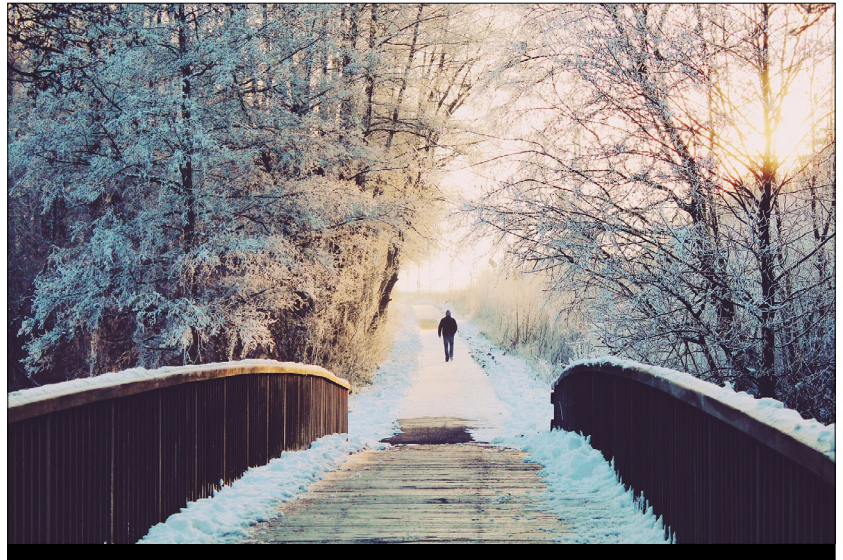
3. Enjoy your mindful walking & learn from it

Try not to put too much pressure on yourself — relax into it and enjoy being present. Ask yourself questions; What are you noticing going on around you? Are you seeing your usual stomping grounds in a slightly different light because you were present and aware and, no longer chatting on the

phone and dreaming of a hot beach somewhere?

What about your body? Have you noticed anything during this walk? Is your right ankle a little sore from a fall you had a week ago? Do you need a hot bath tonight to soak your muscles?

Try and notice feelings and emotions you have along the



way. Perhaps the sound of a child singing in the park made you smile, or the sun's rays made you feel uplifted. You may like to expand your mindfulness to other aspects of life, too, and find yourself much more aware of your surroundings at other points, without even having to tell your mind to do this.

Once your walk is over, have a little think about how you feel. Was it lovely to switch off your brain from the rest of life for a while and just be completely in the moment with yourself, your body, and your immediate surroundings? Does your head feel a little clearer and ready to take on some of those challenges that had been playing on your mind?

We hope you enjoy your mindful walking and really feel that you will gain from it. Just remember: Don't put pressure on yourself, don't worry about whether you are doing it correctly. Just get out there and do it!

Source: <https://www.worldwalks.com/walking-holidays/3->

Exercise tips for staying comfortable, safe on winter days

Walk, run, and play with confidence: When it comes to the proper footwear, ideally it is warm, waterproof, and has excellent traction.

- **Materials to look for include:** water-resistant leather uppers that breathe, rubber outsoles, sealed seams, and a removable synthetic liner with a gusseted tongue.
- **Go with grip.** Some winter boots and running shoes have metal studs built into the sole to protect against slipping on the ice. Adjustable traction cleats with metal spikes or studs that fit over your existing shoes are another great way to improve your footing in slick conditions.
- **Keep the warmth in and the moisture out:** Dressing in layers is the key to enjoying the cold temperatures for a longer period of time.
- **Layering with the right materials allows our bodies to quickly adjust to varying temperatures.** A good base layer is lightweight and made of a synthetic material such as polypropylene, which draws moisture away from your skin. A middle layer like wool or fleece will keep you insulated. An outer layer that is water-resistant and breathable will let moisture out while keeping you dry from the outside elements. During breaks, add a down jacket to keep the snow out & retain the



heat you have generated from exercise. As you begin to move again, remove a layer before you start to sweat.

- In addition, **a warm hat, gloves, mittens, scarf, hand warmers or buff can add to your comfort** in the great outdoors.

Make your workout safe: Remembering to prep for ice, slush, and even sunshine can help minimize our chances for injury or skin-damage.

- If walking is your go-to for winter fitness, **trekking poles** are a great addition. Poles can improve your stability on icy surfaces and, by adding arm activity, they can increase the intensity of your workout.
- **A headlamp is a great way to see and be seen while walking in the early mornings or late evenings.** Or, add a taillight if you choose to ride a bike for your winter workout.
- **Don't forget sun protection.** The sun's rays are just as damaging in the winter as they are in the summer. In addition, your exposure to ultraviolet radiation may be amplified if your skin is exposed on a sunny day by reflection from snow. Water-resistant sunscreen is a good choice to protect you when you sweat or are out in the rain and snow.



- **Always over-prepare.** If your weekend exercise includes a trip into the backcountry, it's always smart to pack extra water, food, and layers. Along with packing, make sure to let a friend or family member know where you are going ahead of time & when you will be back. Look into investing in a watch or alternative device that can send an alert signal if you get stuck in a spot with no service.
- **Check the weather!** This is a simple but easy-to-forget step before exercising. Make sure to review the forecast before leaving your house for the day.
- **Personal Items to consider:** The various lists above cover some of the essentials while exercising but we have also put together a list of personal items, activity-dependent, which you can choose to bring along.



- First aid kit
- Shovel
- Probe and/or Beacon
- Emergency blanket
- Two-way radio
- Lip balm
- Neck gaiter
- Sunglasses
- Extra gloves
- Water proof matches
- Down sleeping bag

WELLNESS COUNTS

Wellness Committee Updates

Thanks for 'sticking' with it

Earlier this month, employees at Crown Road Campus had a chance to pick out some fun, motivational stickers in the break room or work room. Tables loaded with stickers directed employees to “take one for yourself, and take one for a co-worker who might need a reminder of how great they are doing. Thanks for ‘sticking’ with it!”

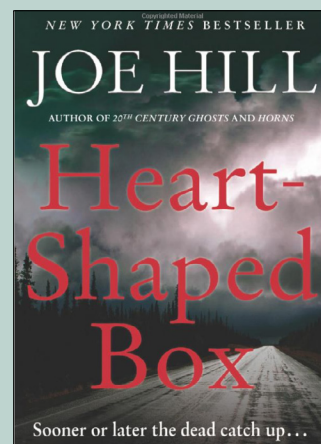


'Lunch and learns' offered at Main Campus

At Main Campus, the Wellness Committee offered several activities for the month of February, including a “lunch and learn” workshop on healthy habits offered by Michelle Stoliker, a Main Campus Wellness Committee member and supervisor of the Employee Assistance Program. On Feb. 11, another “lunch and learn” brought in SEFCU (credit union) to give a virtual presentation on “Budgeting Basics.”

What are we reading?

If you're looking for some good reading, a book club at Main Campus can offer two possible titles. “A Man Called Ove,” a novel by Swedish writer Fredrik Backman, is a light, inspirational story about a local curmudgeon. At right, “Heart-Shaped Box” by Joe Hill — the son of Stephen King — is not for the faint of heart. It was cited as “Best Book of the Year” by Atlanta magazine, the Tampa Tribune, and other reviewers.



Recipe: 'Heart Kabobs' offers fruity fun for Valentine's Day

This recipe comes from Parents magazine as a fun way to enjoy the upcoming Valentine's Day holiday without entirely focusing on food, flowers and chocolate!

Ingredients

- 1 cantaloupe
- 1 honeydew melon
- ½ watermelon
- 1 6-ounce container plain low-fat yogurt
- 1 tablespoon frozen orange-juice concentrate, thawed
- 1 tablespoon honey

Directions

Cut fruit into 1-inch-thick slices. Using a small heart-shaped cookie cutter, cut hearts from melon slices. Poke a hole in each heart with a toothpick, going from top to bottom. Then thread fruit on ice-pop sticks.

Making the Dip

Stir together yogurt, orange juice concentrate, and honey until well combined. Serve with hearts.

Find the full recipe here:

<https://www.parents.com/recipe/desserts/heart-kabobs/>



Did you know?

Teachers are the #1 recipient of Valentines, according to [this list of fun Valentine's Day facts in this recent Women's Day article.](#)

CULTURE COUNTS

Need to cultivate community quickly? Here are some easy tips.

By Randi Downs

Last month, I had the opportunity to teach in one of our Crown Road classrooms. I had never met the students before, but would be spending entire days with them, so I had to build connections with them as quickly as I could. Here are some takeaways from those days:

- **Put structure in place before anything else:** This teacher had such a tight and clean schedule. The students understood exactly what their day would look like when, during the morning meeting, we discussed the schedule. I always say, "Control what you can control," and a daily schedule is welcome in any classroom community, no matter what age group. The students were super proud to fill me in on what happens each day, and I could see they found comfort in that. So did I!
- **Learn the students' names as quickly as you can.** In this case, name cards taped to student desks were a lifesaver as I immediately started saying their names during every interaction.
- **Stand in a circle and ask questions that students are excited to answer.** In this case, I didn't want to use a talking piece (social distancing), so I made up an invisible ball. The students thought this was somewhat odd, but soon we were all tossing our invisible ball around, laughing at our silliness, and answering questions about Random Acts of Kindness (SEL topic).

- **Say goodbye to the students as they leave for specials, then greet them by name when they come back to the room.** Their faces lit up as we continued learning together.
- **Take an interest in something that resonates with them.** In this case, I chatted with one student about cassette tapes and computers, one student about his rock samples (we even turned off the lights so that his cell phone light could shine through the rocks and create patterns on the ceiling), and one student who just wanted to show me the picture of an actor that she had found. Each of these interactions took less than 3 or 4 minutes, but the connections lasted throughout the day.
- **Use affective statements when things are going well.** In this case, I would say, "I appreciate how you are taking turns with the math cubes," or, "I was so excited to see how you persevered with that problem during math time!" These simple statements proved to build and support the community throughout the days that I was there!

I realized, as I connected with students and staff last week, that our teachers and staff here at OCM BOCES are absolutely amazing, and their students love them. I know this because the students showed me in so many ways. I also realized how busy those of you in the classroom are. That's why I wanted to share some tips that will not take extra time but will yield great results.



Kindness tree painted on wall at Crown Road Campus

"KINDNESS IS SPREADING
SUNSHINE INTO PEOPLE'S LIVES
REGARDLESS OF WEATHER."

- FROM THE RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS FOUNDATION

Reminder: Self-care during the winter is important and doable

By Dan Hesler

What is self-care? Self-care is a term that is often used but is rarely defined. The definition of self-care is as follows: the practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health and/or the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular, during periods of stress (Oxford Languages). As the days slowly (very slowly it seems) start to get lighter and a tad warmer, here are 5 simple tips to practice self-care as we start to close out the winter season!

- Take a break. Put down your device, maybe step outside for a minute and take the deepest breath you have all day.
- Make sure to get the recommended amount of sleep!
- Get outside. I understand this looks different for everyone and can be hard during the winter months, but even a few minutes of fresh air can make a huge difference!
- Hydrate. Make sure to drink lots of water.
- Invest in yourself. Call a friend, cook your favorite meal, or spend time with family.

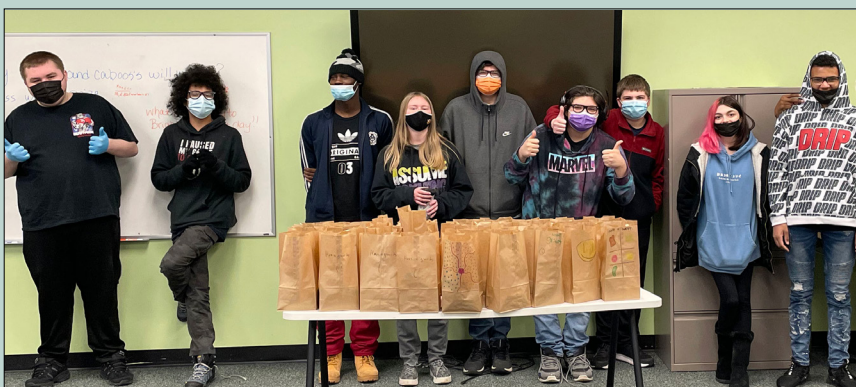
I hope these tips might help and just remember, spring flowers are a month away!



Why sleep?

According to sleep.org, scientists and medical experts are still hard at work unraveling the mysteries of sleep. But after decades of research, one thing is clear: It's hard to overstate the importance of sleep.

Your nightly rest helps regulate a wide range of critical biological functions. Adequate sleep (adults ages 19-64 generally need seven to nine hours per night) also plays a crucial role in regulating mood and metabolism, forming memories, and supporting heart health.



Helping the Homeless

Students in the Crossroads program at Crown Road Campus assembled more than 100 lunches for the Syracuse homeless recently as part of a collaboration with Al-amin Muhamed and his Syracuse-based non-profit called ["We Rise Above the Streets."](https://www.weriseabovestreets.org) The lunches were for "Sandwich Saturdays," when Al-amin and his team deliver bagged lunches and hygiene products to those in need. A few years ago, Crossroads students heard Al-amin's story in person and have been collaborating with him and his organization ever since on a variety of projects. For this event, Crossroads also worked with students in the OCM BOCES Friends of Rachel (FOR) Club.