

Walking for Mental Health

Daily Protocol & Weekly Planner

Evidence-based · calmsveritas.com

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUPPORTS

Walking 30–45 min at moderate intensity 3–5x/week produces clinically significant reductions in depression and anxiety (Blumenthal et al., Archives of Internal Medicine, 1999). Hippocampal volume increases ~2% after 12 months of aerobic walking (Erickson et al., PNAS, 2011). 90-min nature walks reduce activity in brain regions linked to rumination (Bratman et al., PNAS, 2015).

MORNING WALK PROTOCOL (20–30 MIN)

- Walk within 2 hours of waking — cortisol is already elevated; movement helps metabolize it
- Target brisk pace: slightly elevated heart rate, can still hold conversation
- Aim for outdoor or green-space route when possible
- Leave phone on silent or podcast-free for the first 10 minutes
- Note one thing you observed or thought about on your return

EVENING WALK PROTOCOL (15–20 MIN)

- Walk 60–90 min before sleep — light activity aids sleep onset without raising core temperature
- Slow to relaxed pace (natural walking speed)
- Use as deliberate worry time: if anxious thoughts arise, note them for tomorrow
- Avoid bright screen use for 10 min after returning

WEEKLY STEP LOG

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
steps	steps	steps	steps	steps	steps	steps

MINIMUM EFFECTIVE DOSE

150 min/week total (WHO guideline) · 7,000–9,000 steps/day · At least 3 sessions of 20+ min continuous walking · Benefits measurable at 8 weeks, significant at 12–16 weeks · Outdoor walking produces larger mood effects than treadmill walking at equivalent dose

IF YOU MISS DAYS

- Restart without compensating — missed days don't need to be made up
- Reduce session target to 10 min if motivation is low (still effective for mood)
- Pair with an audiobook or podcast after the first 10 min of silent walking