

Walking boosts mental health as winter takes hold

Calls for Scots to embrace walking. The national walking charity is calling on everyone to walk and wheel to beat the winter blues this Blue Monday.

Today is often considered the most depressing day of the year due to a combination of financial pressure, broken New Year's resolutions, and limited daylight.

Walking has proven to be a powerful tool for mental wellbeing, with national walking charity, [Paths for All](#) reporting 84% of Scots say they walk to improve their health and wellbeing, up from 78% in 2019 according to the 2023 National Survey of Attitudes to Walking and Wheeling in Scotland.

As well as releasing feel-good endorphins, walking and wheeling offers a chance to clear the mind, alleviate stress, and improve concentration. These benefits are especially vital during the darker winter months when Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) can take hold.

Beyond the individual benefits, walking and wheeling also play a vital role in addressing broader societal issues such as loneliness and isolation. Qualitative feedback highlights how walking fosters a sense of connection and combats feelings of loneliness, particularly for individuals who live alone or work remotely.

Kevin Lafferty, Chief Executive Officer, said: "Winter can be

a particularly challenging time for mental health, but walking and wheeling are free, accessible, and effective ways to support your wellbeing.

“Taking a walk during daylight hours not only helps to boost our mood, but also provides the opportunity to connect with nature and others, both of which are vital for our mental resilience.”

Walking offers a multitude of benefits, including opportunities to enjoy local greenspaces, parks, and beaches, which can foster a sense of calm and connection to nature while incorporating physical activity into daily routines, whether walking to school, work or the shops.

Joining a local walking group or walking with friends and family can strengthen social connections, further enhancing the benefits of this simple yet powerful activity.

Encouraging more Scots to walk during winter, particularly in natural outdoor settings, is a timely reminder of how small lifestyle changes can yield big mental health benefits as well as physical. One survey participant described walking as their “lifeline during the winter,” while another shared how a daily walk helped them better manage stress and feel more grounded.

This activity also supports Scotland’s ambition to improve overall health outcomes and reduce pressures on public services. Walking is a free and accessible activity, making it a viable solution for individuals from all walks of life, regardless of their circumstances.

Paths for All supports local projects to deliver over 850 Health Walks across Scotland. These are free, short group walks led by friendly volunteers and you can find your nearest on the paths for All website: <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/health-walks>

Established in 1996, Paths for All work in partnership with 30

national organisations with a shared vision of a healthier, happier, greener Scotland, where everyone can be active every day.

www.pathsforall.org.uk

