

Out on the Trail



[John Bagnulo](#) is a nutritionist and Healthy Living team member who regularly leads fitness walks and hikes as part of the [Kripalu Healthy Living Programs](#). Below, he tells us why walking and hiking are like yoga, what they add to his life, and how you can get started yourself.

I think walking is the single most beneficial exercise a person can engage in. It's what humans are designed to do. If we walk regularly, and walk with purpose once in a while, we can get so much out of it in so many ways—not just physiologically but spiritually, mentally, and emotionally as well. Hiking is a natural fit here in the Berkshires—with the beautiful surroundings, there's always something to look at, and with the hills, you have intervals and mixtures of intensity, providing a cardiovascular workout that complements the flexibility and strength fostered by a traditional yoga practice. There is a great crossover from the yoga mat to the woods. When people start to walk or hike, they start to focus on the breath in much the same way that one does during yoga. Walking and hiking are my yoga. That's where I focus on breathwork, where I really let go of everything else in life and am in the moment more so than any other aspect of my life.

At an early age, hiking and climbing really gave me a sense of purpose, a sense of focus. I found early on that when I was hiking, I was there, the whole time—not daydreaming but being really present, totally in the moment. I loved that sense of focus that I hadn't found anywhere else in life.

Now I hike for spiritual reasons more than anything else. For some people, when they start hiking it's the first time they ever really get in touch with the natural world. And for me, that is my religion—being connected to nature as much as possible. There isn't a better way for me to let go of all the stuff in life, all the garbage, than to get out on a trail, get out in the woods.

For people who want to get started hiking, there are a couple things I recommend: Start out slow. Listen to your body. Go easy on the downhill—try to find a hiking route that has a steeper ascent and a more gradual descent. If you have knee pain, ankle pain, or other kinds of pain, you may have to back off at first. And don't forget to find an area that you love and find visually compelling.