

## [3-Fitness & Wellness](#)

Your Guide to Accomplish What You Thought Impossible!

### **The Health and Spiritual Benefits of Walking the Labyrinth**

by **Barbara Z. Kodlubanski**

It is no coincidence that a majority of labyrinths open to the public can be found on church grounds and medical facilities. For thousands of years, the many who have walked these mystical unicursal paths (i.e. the way in is also the only way out) have professed spiritual and health benefits from doing so.

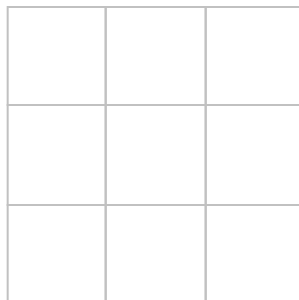
In fact, the medical benefits of walking a labyrinth are similar to those seen from meditation and more specifically, walking meditation. Herbert Benson, MD, founder of the [Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital](#), has found that like sitting meditation, focused walking is highly efficient at reducing anxiety and triggering a "relaxation response." This effect has significant long-term health benefits, including lowering blood pressure, slowing breathing rates, reducing incidents of chronic pain, and reducing insomnia.

Neal Harris, a licensed clinical professional counselor and managing director of [Relax4Life](#), a holistic education center in Barrington, Illinois, has written about the use of finger and walking labyrinths in his practice. In Harris' article, "[Off the Couch: An Introduction to Labyrinths & Their Therapeutic Properties](#)," he discusses some anecdotal research indicating how labyrinths positively effect the brain wave activity and neurological responses of some users, resulting in short-term increases in mental clarity in people with Alzheimer's, schizophrenia and dyslexia.

Walking meditation has been used for centuries by Buddhist monks in their spiritual practice and it has recently received greater attention by the general public through Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hahn's book [The Long Road Turns to Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation](#). What often hinders individuals from trying meditation is the challenge of trying to overcome the restless and uncomfortable feeling of sitting quietly for an extended period of time; on the other hand, a walking meditation offers a rhythmic structure which can help those who struggle to stay focused during sitting meditation. Labyrinth walking further enhances the meditative experience because a specific path already has been laid out to follow, allowing the person to fully focus on the moment.

It's no wonder that there are innumerable numbers of labyrinths at churches and more than 50 at medical facilities nationwide, including locally [Lake Forest Hospital](#) in Lake Forest, Illinois and [Marianjoy Rehabilitation Institute](#) in Wheaton, Illinois.

The next article in the series will provide several approaches to walking a labyrinths, including its oracle and self discovery uses.



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