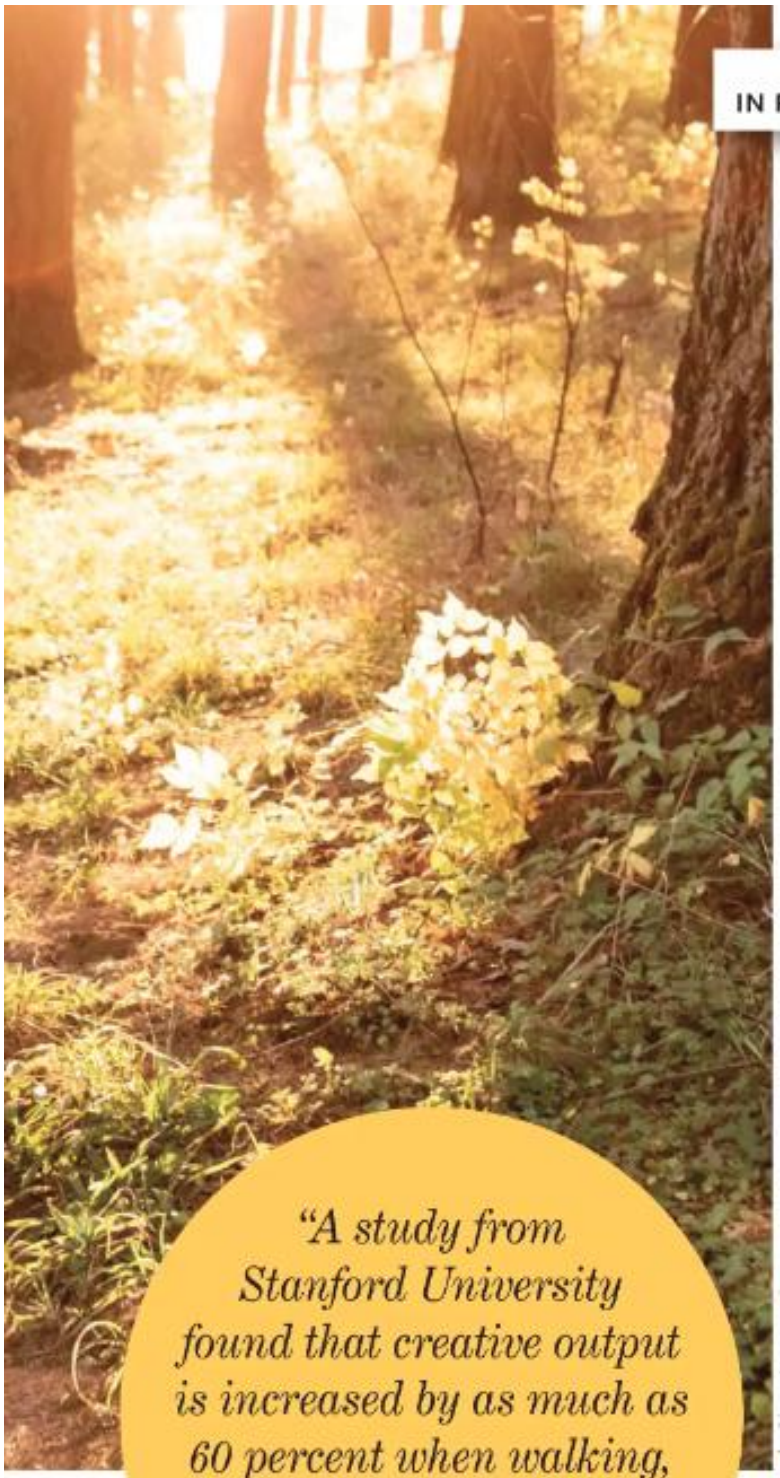

"A study from Stanford University found that creative output is increased by as much as 60 percent when walking, compared with when you're sitting down"

LIGHTBULB MOMENT

Ever stepped away from a project or brainstorm and the ideas just come flooding in? You can thank your relaxed state of mind which conveniently enters when you're walking, says Juan Carlos Gouveia, a rapid transformational therapist from Change I Deserve (changeideserve.com). "If you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed, your body prepares for you to take action and run from the perceived danger, such as looming deadlines or a big presentation, for example. The body answers to this stress call by prioritising blood flow to your legs and hands, but this means that blood moves away from the brain and causes us to be less engaged." He adds that when we're in a state of 'flow', we're relaxed and focused, therefore creative thoughts can enter our minds without the interference from some of the 'mind chatter' we may experience when we're feeling the pressure (think: 'I've got a million things on my to-do list and the kids still need help with their homework'). And the question of not being able to think while we've got a mental block? Dr Aria suggests going for a walk the next time you're required to plan or multi-task, which is like, always probably. "Walking increases blood flow to the brain, so it can enhance thought processes and creativity. A study from Stanford University found that creative output is increased by as much as 60 percent when walking, compared with when you're sitting down." So, the next time your boss suggests a walking meeting, this might be the perfect opportunity to impress them!

A SPRING IN YOUR STEP

Picture this: you're sweating it out during your HIIT or sprint session and patiently waiting for inspiration to come flooding through, but to no avail. If you suffer from weak joints or are just starting your fitness journey, walking is an excellent choice of exercise, and this could also be the case if you're searching for some creativity. "Intense exercise is all-consuming and you are so 'in the zone' that you may not notice immediate creative benefits," says Dr Aria. "They could come later, however, as a result of the circulatory boost to the brain, as long as you don't become exhausted through lack of glucose, which the brain primarily uses as fuel." Juan echoes this and points out that you might be too busy recovering from your intense exercise session to allow the creative thoughts to flow. "Intense exercise generates stress hormones, which is not conducive if you're seeking to focus on your creativity. Another plus about walking is that you can use this time to keep fit and brainstorm ideas with colleagues or another member of your team who may be working on the same project." There's good news if you prefer to walk on a treadmill in the gym too (because, steps and well, Netflix), as it appears to be the act of walking, rather than the environment, that boosts creativity, according to Dr Aria. "In one study, walking indoors on a treadmill facing a blank wall was as effective as walking outdoors in the fresh air and produced twice as many creative responses, compared to a person sitting down." Having said that, nature shouldn't be disregarded when it comes to your imagination, as there are studies that show a green setting, forest bathing and sea air can enhance wellbeing, relaxation and creativity, he says.

EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

Walking isn't just good for the working environment, as there are certain things you can look out for en route that may benefit your personal life too, says Natalie Trice, a confidence and visibility coach (natalietrice.co.uk). The colour of the leaves could encourage you to pick up your paint brushes, or you might smell someone cooking a roast dinner and decide to try a new recipe, for instance. She recommends the following exercise to do when you're out on your stroll. "Walk for five minutes, then mentally list five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can smell, two things you can feel and one thing you can add to your walk. Doing this enables your brain to take over, and as you walk on, you will start to calm your mind and find that creative ideas come to you." Ready to take your creative edge to the next step? We'll be right beside you. **H W**