

Body Scan Mindfulness Exercise

Before we begin, take time to get yourself comfortable. To do the body scan, you can either sit in a chair, or if you prefer, lie on your back on a rug or a mat. Wherever you choose to do this, make sure that you're completely comfortable, and able to let the chair, mat or rug support you completely. It may be worth placing something behind your head, either a pillow or a cushion to keep your spine and neck straight.

It is important that you arrange to do this practice in a warm and protected place, in which you feel comfortable and secure. It's best to do it at a time when family, pets or phone calls, won't interrupt you. Dress in loose comfortable clothes being particularly conscious to wear clothes that are loose at the waist. It is helpful to see this as a time for you, a time for nurturing yourself for self-care, as an opportunity to be by yourself and fully with yourself. If you feel comfortable to do so, close your eyes or else focus on a spot in the room.

Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breath and the sensations in the body. When you are ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, especially to the sensations of touch or pressure, where your body makes contact with the chair or bed. On each out-breath, allow yourself to let go, to sink a little deeper into the chair or bed. There is no right way to feel while you do this. The way you're feeling is fine; it's just the way you're feeling. Simply accept it, giving yourself permission to feel whatever it is that you're feeling.

Remind yourself of the intention of this practice. Its aim is not to feel any different, relaxed, or calm; this may happen or it may not. Instead, the intention of the practice is, as best you can, to bring awareness to any sensations you detect, as you focus your attention on each part of the body in turn.

Now bring your attention to the fact that you're breathing, not changing the breath in any way, but simply experiencing the air as it comes into and out of the body. Becoming aware of the abdomen rising as the air comes into the body, and falling as the air moves out of the body. Not controlling the breath in any way. Rather just becoming aware of the natural rhythm and flow of the breath, noticing that as the breath flows naturally, the abdomen lifts with each in breath and falls with each out breath.

Having connected with the sensations in the abdomen, bring the focus or "spotlight" of your awareness down the left leg, into the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Focus on each of the toes of the left foot in turn, bringing a gentle curiosity to investigate the quality of the sensations you find, perhaps noticing the sense of contact between the toes, a sense of tingling, warmth, or no particular sensation.

When you are ready, on an inbreath, feel or imagine the breath entering the lungs, and then passing down into the abdomen, into the left leg, the left foot, and out to the toes of the left foot. Then, on the outbreath, feel or imagine the breath coming all the way back up, out of the foot, into the leg, up through the abdomen, chest, and out through the nose. As best you can, continue this for a few breaths, breathing down into the toes, and back out from the toes. It may be difficult to get the hang of this just practice this "breathing into" as best you can, approaching it playfully.

Now, when you are ready, on an outbreath, let go of awareness of the toes, and bring your awareness to the sensations on the bottom of your left foot—bringing a gentle, investigative awareness to the sole of the foot, the instep, the heel (e.g., noticing the sensations where the heel makes contact with the mat or bed). Experiment with "breathing with" the sensations—being aware of the breath in the background, as, in the foreground, you explore the sensations of the lower foot.

Now allow the awareness to expand into the rest of the foot—to the ankle, the top of the foot, and right into the bones and joints. Then, taking a slightly deeper breath, directing it down into the whole of the left foot, and, as the breath lets go on the outbreath, let go of the left foot completely, allowing the focus of awareness to move into the lower left leg—the calf, shin, knee, and so on, in turn.

Continue to bring awareness, and a gentle curiosity, to the physical sensations in each part of the rest of the body in turn - to the upper left leg, the right toes, right foot, right leg, pelvic area, back, abdomen, chest, fingers, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, head, and face. In each area, as best you can, bring the same detailed level of awareness and gentle curiosity to the bodily sensations present. As you leave each major area, "breathe in" to it on the inbreath, and let go of that region on the outbreath.

When you become aware of tension, or of other intense sensations in a particular part of the body, you can "breathe in" to them—using the inbreath gently to bring awareness right into the sensations, and, as best you can, have a sense of their letting go, or releasing, on the outbreath.

The mind will inevitably wander away from the breath and the body from time to time. That is entirely normal. It is what minds do. When you notice it, gently acknowledge it, noticing where the mind has gone off to, and then gently return your attention to the part of the body you intended to focus on.

After you have "scanned" the whole body in this way, spend a few minutes being aware of a sense of the body as a whole, and of the breath flowing freely in and out of the body.

As we come to the end of the practice, slowly begin to expand your awareness of your body. Seeing yourself as complete right now. Become aware of your position and the physical sensations. Slowly begin to wiggle your toes and fingers. Drawing your attention out and expanding it to the room, to your position, slowly allowing the light to bring you back to the room. Become aware of the sounds around you and slowly open your eyes. If needed, take a gentle stretch and move around.

Recommendations:

If you find it difficult to practice this on your own, you can initially ask someone to read the above script to you or listen to a guided meditation. It may even be worth recording your own.

If you struggle with the exercise at first, remember that this technique is like any other and you become more skilled and comfortable with it as you keep on practising.

If you find yourself falling asleep, it may be worth trying a different position, or perhaps keeping your eyes open and fixed on a spot.

Remember to keep your spine straight and be comfortable.