

Mindfulness practice: Body Scanning

Performing the body scan creates a journey of individual experience. The body scan allows you to bring mindfulness to your body by actually experiencing the body one part at a time. Observing the body with the breath allows you to release tension as your focus passes thru each body part. The body scan allows you to cultivate a strong mindful focus of each body part and awareness of each distinct piece. When practicing the body-scan technique, let go of expectations or any pre-formed ideas of your body. In our society, there are many images about what is “right” or “perfect” and what the body is supposed to *look* or *feel* like. During the body scan, you take the time to step away from these expectations, judgment or comparisons about your body and discover what *IS*.

We use the body scan to move into a positive body experience, including the complexity and memories that comes along with it. The body scan helps bring our mind and body to an awareness and acceptance of the present moment, whatever that moment has in store. The body scan will be a bit different each moment and time as you explore your body. Each body area is going to “feel” unique. A number of different sensations or even emotions may be experienced, or you can feel nothing at all. You learn whatever you find during the body scan is acceptable, because that is where you are in the present moment.

Direct your thoughts with a non-judgmental attitude and patience. Try to be present with a beginner’s mindset. Allow yourself to experience *what* your body is feeling~ not thinking of what it *should* feel like. Train yourself to be thoughtful and open minded to the body’s experience, exploring the richness of each moment with no expectations. Staying in the present moment and exploring self-acceptance is threaded throughout all Mindfulness practices

In this process, there is no finish line to reach. There is no chance of “failure” or ultimate “success” because you are already here. The body scan simply brings awareness to each part of the body. Often we are so accustomed to our body as a whole, we tune out to its sensations. Sensitivity to what is “found” or noticed about your body will change from time to time. The mind will wander, especially at first. Practice will help develop concentration.



Beginning the Body Scan

The body scan begins lying on your back in a comfortable spot on the floor, an exercise mat, your bed or a chair if you are unable to lie flat. You may want a blanket to stay warm. Start by observing the top of your body in contact with the air and the body areas below touching the surface you are resting on. Allow your eyes to relax closed or with a soft gaze, try to keep the body still and not move about during the scan. Observe your breath as the abdomen rises and falls. Feel the body as a “whole.”

Then, with a light focus and visualization, move your attention through the different regions of the body. If thoughts come to your mind, do not worry, feel guilty, or get caught up in them, simply let thoughts go with a non-judgmental attitude and shift your attention back to your body. With a light focus, do not think *too* much about the area you are concentrating on. You simply want to be mindful and aware of how the body area feels in the present moment. You can focus by either visualizing the region of interest or being aware of how it feels. As you are ready to move to the next area of the body allow yourself to “let go” and move the focus onto the next part.

Moving Through the Body

Begin your focus on the toes of your left foot, with this focus also direct the breath to the toes. Breathing into *each* toe, and out from the toe. Slowly move your attention and the breath to the bottom of the left foot, top of the foot, ankle and into the heel, the calf, the knee, the thigh then the hip. When you have completed the left leg, let it go and move your focus to the right toes, mentally travel thru the right leg in the same manner as the left, breathing with focused attention on each part and letting each region go as you move on. Next, move through the pelvis and buttocks, lower back, mid and upper back~ then into abdomen and up the chest to the shoulders. Observe and breathe into the hands, beginning with each finger, palm, and wrist and into both arms up to the shoulders and through the neck. Move into the jaw and all parts of the face, ears, scalp and then observe your head resting on the ground. If possible, imagine a hole at the top of the head~ much like a whale’s blowhole. Finish with the breath flowing from the top of the head freely across the body out the toes and then back into the toes out the head.

At the end of the scan, rest in silence for a few moments, keep your mind free of attention, let it do what it wants; give it space and a moment of freedom. When you are ready to finish, gently open your eyes, observe what you are experiencing. Recognize your body as whole, with many smaller parts working together

You can use a recorded body scan guide until you get into your own flow.