

BODY SCAN

At the center of your being you have the answer. – Lao Tzu

People are often out of touch with their body. They respond to pain or discomfort by trying to distract themselves or numb the pain. They fear their body does not live up to some impossible ideal. In a mindfulness body scan exercise, you can learn to accept and notice with gentle curiosity your body in its comfort and discomfort, in its perfection and imperfection. The goal is not to relax your body or relieve pain – although relaxation, self-acceptance and an ability to face pain may result. The body scan is used simply to become aware of your body as it is, without judgement, in the moment.

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, loosen any tight clothing and close your eyes.
2. Notice your breathing, and the natural rising and falling of your belly.
3. Take a moment to feel your body as a whole, from head to toe.
4. Starting with your feet, begin to notice your physical feelings, including any pain, discomfort, coolness, warmth, tension or tightness. Simply pay attention to the physical feelings and sensations. Don't judge the feelings as either good or bad, and don't try to change them. Simply become aware of them.
5. Slowly allow your awareness to drift up from your feet to your lower legs. Continue simply paying attention to any physical sensations in each part of your body, including any tightness, pain or discomfort.
6. Slowly let your awareness drift further up your body, doing the same gentle noticing for all of the parts of your body – your upper legs, hips, buttocks, pelvic region, stomach, chest, your lower back, upper back, fingers and hands, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, neck, head, forehead, temples and face – eyes, cheeks, nose, mouth, jaw line.
7. Then, let your awareness drift gently and slowly back down your body, noticing any other places where there is pain, discomfort or tension and simply notice this, until your awareness settles back at your feet.

Tips:

- You can start by doing this exercise for just 5 minutes, and work up to 20 or 30 minutes. Don't worry about how long it takes – just allow yourself to pay attention to the sensations in your body.
- If thoughts intrude while doing this exercise, that's okay – just notice the thoughts and then gently guide your awareness back to your body.
- With practice, you can begin to imagine directing your breath into each part of your body, as if you were breathing into your toes, and out from your toes (legs, chest, shoulders, head, etc.).
- Don't use the body scan to replace conventional medical care or as a reason to postpone seeing a health care provider about a medical problem.

