



## The Body Scan

We can step out of automatic pilot and become more present to our experience by bringing our attention into the body, and into the direct experience of body sensations. The intention is not to think about sensations in the body, but to sense them directly, come up close to them, to be with them.

More often than not, we are an observer of our own bodies looking down on it both physically and metaphorically thinking, "Oh, yes, there's a bit of a pain there, a bit of an itch there, I don't like that bit - I must do something about it." However, there is a different possibility. We can learn to bring the mind right into the body and inhabit the whole of it with awareness.

1. Make yourself comfortable lying down on your back, in a place where you will feel warm and undisturbed. You can lie on a mat or rug on the floor, or on your bed if you can stay awake. It is also okay to do the body scan sitting in a chair if lying down doesn't feel comfortable. Allow your eyes to close gently.
2. Take a few moments to bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body, how it feels to come to stillness. Then becoming aware of the space body is taking up, its edges, and the sensations of touch or pressure where your body makes contact with the floor or bed beneath you.
3. The intention for the practice, is to gently step out of automatic pilot and to be aware of your experience as it is unfolding, whatever that might be. So seeing if you can let go of any expectations, the natural tendency to want things to be a certain way, and just allow your experience to be exactly as you find it. The practice invites you to bring a gentle awareness to any and all sensations in the body as you focus your attention systematically on each part of the body in turn. There is no need to try and become more calm or relaxed, although this might happen.
4. Now gathering your awareness and turning your attention to the breath. Noticing that the body is breathing and bringing your awareness to where you notice that most clearly. Perhaps this is in the nostrils, the back of the throat, the chest, or the belly. You might like to place a hand on the belly to get a clearer sense of the movement of the breath there, the gentle rise and fall of the abdominal wall as the breath moves into the body and as it moves out of the body. There is no need to change the breath in any way, simply notice when you are breathing in, and notice when you are breathing out. On the out-breath, allow yourself to sink a little deeper into the ground beneath, knowing it can support you.
5. Having connected with the sensations in the belly, now bring the focus or spotlight of your attention down the left leg, into the left foot, and all the way to the toes. Focus on each of the toes in turn, bringing a gentle, interested, affectionate attention to be with, and investigate the quality of the sensations you find, perhaps noticing the sense of contact between the toes, a sense of tingling, warmth, perhaps numbness. Whatever sensations you experience are okay – strong, subtle, pleasant, unpleasant, or no sensation at all. That is your experience in this moment.
6. When you are ready, on an in-breath, sense or imagine the breath can travel from the lungs all the way down the body, through the left leg, to the toes of the left foot. On the out-breath, sense or imagine the breath coming all the way back up from the toes and the foot, through the leg and body and out through the nose. As best you can, continue breathing in this way for a few breaths,

breathing down into the toes on each in-breath and back out from the toes on each out-breath . It may be difficult to get the hang of this-just practice this "breathing into" as best you can, approaching it playfully.

7. Now, when you are ready, taking a slightly deeper more intentional breath, and on the out-breath, let go of the toes and bring your awareness to the sensations in the bottom of your left foot bringing a gentle, investigative awareness to the sole of the foot, the instep, the heel (noticing, for example, the sensations where the heel makes contact with the mat or bed). Experiment with "breathing with" any and all sensations that you notice (being aware of the *breath in the background*, and *body sensations in the foreground*) as you explore the bottom of the foot.

8. Now allow the awareness to expand into the rest of the foot - to the ankle, the top of the foot, right into the bones and joints. Then take a deeper and more intentional breath in, directing it down into the whole of the left foot, and, on the out-breath, completely let go of the left foot, allowing the focus of awareness to move into the lower left leg - the calf, shin, knee, and so forth, in turn.

9. Continue to scan the body, dwelling for a time with each part of the body in turn: the left shin, the left knee, the left thigh; the right toes and then the foot and ankle, the right lower leg, the right knee, the right thigh; the pelvic area - groin, buttocks, and hips; the lower back and the abdomen, the upper back, and the chest and shoulders. Then move to hands, investigating both at the same time. Resting the attention first with the sensations in the fingers and thumbs, the palms and the backs of both hands, the wrists, the lower arms and elbows, the upper arms; the shoulders again and the armpits; the neck; the face (jaw, mouth, lips, nose, cheeks, ears, eyes, forehead); and then the entirety of the head.

10. When you become aware of tension or of other intense sensations in a particular part of the body, you can choose to:

- ✓ use the in-breath to breathe up to, and into those areas of intense sensations. Gently and kindly using the breath to open up a space to investigate and get a better sense of the patterns of discomfort. Where does it start, and where does it end? Does it change at all? And then noticing if there is any change to the sensations on the out-breath, any sense of softening, releasing, perhaps the out-breath carrying away some of the discomfort.
- ✓ Return your awareness fully to the anchor of the breath.

11 . 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 and it doesn't mean that you have done anything wrong. 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.

12. 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. Perhaps becoming aware of the completeness of the body, and a sense of allowing the body to be just as it is in this moment, allowing yourself as you are in this moment.

13. It is also very important to remind yourself that if you, like most modern people, suffer from low-grade chronic sleep deprivation, since the body scan is done lying down, it is very easy to fall asleep. If you find yourself falling asleep, you might find it helpful to prop your head up with a pillow, open your eyes, or do the practice sitting up rather than lying down .