

meditation

Body Scan

The body scan is a wonderful practice to help relax the body and tune into physical sensations. This is an effective practice for developing both deep concentration and flexible attention. It involves lying on your back and moving your awareness through the different regions of your body. If lying on your back is uncomfortable or not possible, you can sit upright or lie on your side. At the end of the practice, you may feel a shift in your energy level and physical and mental states. The body scan can be especially helpful if you are having difficulty sleeping or are coping with chronic pain or other physical discomfort. If you are very tired you may find that you fall asleep in the middle of the practice, and that is ok. Sometimes sleep is what you need the most. However, in order to get the most out of this practice, use it often with the intention of remaining awake. If staying awake is difficult, practice with your eyes open. Simply soften your gaze and pick one spot in the room to focus on.

The following instructions are adapted from *Full Catastrophe Living*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn.

1. Lie down on your back (or another position that works for you) in a comfortable place, with the intention of remaining awake. Make sure that you are warm enough.
2. Allow your eyes to gently close. If staying awake is difficult, keep the eyes open, soften your gaze, and pick a spot to focus on.
3. Feel the rise and fall of the belly with each inbreath and outbreath.
4. Take a few moments to feel your body as a whole from head to toe, the “envelope” of the skin, any sensations in the body or at points of contact with the bed or floor.
5. Bring your attention to the toes of your left foot. As you direct your attention to your toes, see if you can “direct” or channel your

breathing to them as well, so that it feels as if you are breathing *into* your toes and out *from* your toes. This may take some practice. It may help to just imagine your breath travelling down from your nose into your lungs and then continuing through the abdomen and down the left leg all the way to the toes and then back again and out through the nose.

6. Allow yourself to notice and feel any and all sensations from your toes. If you don't feel anything at the moment, that is ok too. Just allow yourself to feel "not feeling anything."
7. When you are ready to leave the toes and move on, take a deeper, more intentional breath all the way down to the toes and, on the outbreath, allow them to "dissolve" in your mind's eye. Stay with your breathing for a few breaths and then move on in turn to the sole of the foot, the heel, the top on the foot, and then the ankle, continuing to breathe into and out from each region as you observe the sensations that you are experiencing, then letting go of the sensations and moving on.
8. Each time you notice that your attention has wandered off, gently bring your mind back to the breath and to the region you are focusing on.
9. Continue to move slowly up your left leg and through the rest of your body. Maintain the focus on the breath and on the sensations in each body region. Breathe into and out from each region, and then let that region go. If you are experiencing pain in a particular area, visualize or imagine the breath to softening, soothing, and easing your experience.
10. It is helpful to practice the body scan for 45 minutes a day for at least two weeks in order to begin to build a solid mindfulness practice. If that seems overwhelming, it is still very useful to do a shorter version (15-30 minutes) of the practice.

Adapted from *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn