

BODY SCAN MEDITATION

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **3X/WEEK** | Duration: **30 MINS**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

This exercise asks you to systematically focus your attention on different parts of your body, from your feet to the muscles in your face. It is designed to help you develop a mindful awareness of your bodily sensations, and to relieve tension wherever it is found. Research suggests that this mindfulness practice can help reduce stress, improve well-being, and decrease aches and pains.

TIME REQUIRED

20-45 minutes, three to six days per week for four weeks. Research suggests that people who practice the body scan for longer reap more benefits from this practice.

HOW TO DO IT

*The body scan can be performed while lying down, sitting, or in other postures. The steps below are a guided meditation designed to be done while sitting. You can listen to audio of this three-minute guided meditation, produced by UCLA's [Mindful Awareness Research Center \(MARC\)](#), in the player; if it doesn't play, you can find it [here](#) or download it from [MARC's website](#).**

Especially for those new to the body scan, we recommend performing this practice with the audio. However, you can also use the script below for guidance for yourself or for leading this practice for others.

1. Begin by bringing your attention into your body.
2. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.
3. You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.
4. Take a few deep breaths.
5. And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.
6. You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.
7. You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.
8. Notice your back against the chair.
9. Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.
10. Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight. See if you can allow them to soften.
11. Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.
12. Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.
13. Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.
14. Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.
15. Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

* You can also listen to a [45-minute version](#) of the Body Scan that the UC San Diego Center for Mindfulness uses in its trainings in *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Carmody, J. & Baer, R. A. (2008). [Relationships between mindfulness practice and levels of mindfulness, medical and psychological symptoms, and well-being in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program](#). *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 31(1), 23-33.

Participants who attended eight weekly sessions of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MSBR) program showed increases in mindfulness and well-being at the end of the eight weeks, and decreases in stress and symptoms of mental illness. Time spent engaging in the body scan in particular was associated with greater levels of two components of mindfulness—observing thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, and non-reacting to stress—and with increased psychological well-being.

WHY IT WORKS

The body scan provides a rare opportunity for us to experience our body as it is, without judging or trying to change it. It may allow us to notice and release a source of tension we weren't aware of before, such as a hunched back or clenched jaw muscles. Or it may draw our attention to a source of pain and discomfort. Our feelings of resistance and anger toward pain often only serve to increase that pain, and to increase the distress associated with it; according to research, by simply noticing the pain we're experiencing, without trying to change it, we may actually feel some relief.

The body scan is designed to counteract these negative feelings toward our bodies. This practice may also increase our general attunement to our physical needs and sensations, which can in turn help us take better care of our bodies and make healthier decisions about eating, sleep, and exercise.

SOURCES

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Steven D. Hickman, Psy.D., [UC San Diego Center for Mindfulness](#)

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

