



BODY SCAN FOR SLEEP

"Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is relax."

—Mark Black

OVERVIEW

A mindfulness practice to help release the tension in the body in order to rest peacefully.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the year
- Before bedtime
- When you are struggling to sleep

TIME REQUIRED

- 13:50 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult
- College

MATERIALS

- Quiet place to sleep

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- Prepare your body for sleep by systematically relaxing your body from head to toe

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Ask yourself before beginning: Can I allow myself to focus on my body right now? Am I able to kindly redirect my attention to my body as thoughts continue to pop up for me? Do I believe I deserve time for rest and relaxation?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

- This is a guided body scan meditation to help you prepare for sleep. As you do the meditation, you may find yourself drifting off to sleep. This is fine, so you can allow the meditation to turn off on its own. If you notice thoughts such as worries or concerns arising that take your attention away from the meditation, this is also normal. See if you can redirect your attention back to the body scan, gently letting go of these thoughts.
- If it's possible, we'll be noticing our body lying down on the bed. We'll be feeling the body's sensations that are present, scanning the body for any kinds of obvious sensations like vibrations, tingling sensations, heaviness, pressure, movement, heat, and coolness. We'll be noticing these sensations without trying to change them or make them different, simply bringing a mindful attention of curiosity and openness to the present moment.
- If you notice yourself starting to think about the sensation or think about something else, see if you can simply come back to the feelings and sensations present in your body.

THE PRACTICE

Click [here](#) for the audio recording and/or use the script below to guide yourself through a body scan.

- We can begin the meditation by noticing the sensations at the top of our head. So simply bring your attention to the top of your head and notice what you feel. You might notice some vibration or pressure. And then allow your attention to notice your skull as it makes contact with the bed or the pillow.
- There might be a sense of pressure, weight. You might notice some other sensations. Simply be curious about these sensations, feeling them.
- Sometimes when you encounter a sensation, there may be some tension. If you can, allow it to gently relax. If that doesn't seem possible, simply notice what it is that you feel.

- Now notice your face area, your forehead, eyes, nose. Notice your cheeks and mouth. There may be sensations of tingling, temperature, tightness; let it all be there. Be curious about your experience. And begin to notice the sensations in your throat and neck.
- And become aware of anything that's present for you in your shoulder area. If at any point you notice tension arising, sometimes in the act of noticing it, you may find yourself releasing the tension and relaxing. If it feels extremely tense, you can breathe gently, directing the breathing into that area to allow it to soften. And if it still stays tense, just continue on with the body scan.
- At this moment you're aware of the sensations in your left shoulder. Bring your attention there, and then let your attention go down your arm, noticing any vibration, tingling heat, coolness, pressure, movement. As you reach your elbow, your lower arm, and then your hand. There are often quite a few sensations in your hand area.
- Notice your hands and fingers. Be curious and open to the sensations that are present. Also allowing your hands to soften and relax.
- Now bring your attention up to your right shoulder, again noticing any sensations that might be present. And then start to go down your right arm, feeling vibration, tingling, movement. Noticing your elbow. Your forearm. And then also your hands. And fingers.
- Again, lots of sensations are usually present in our hands and fingers. But if at any point there's no sensation, just notice the absence of sensation. Let your attention go back to the top of your shoulders--to your back. Notice the shoulder area. Soften, breathe, and begin to bring your attention down your back.
- You can zigzag it across your back, or make an up-and-down movement in your mind. Sometimes there is strong sensation in our back--the sensation of touching the bed--pressure, weight. Sometimes there's not much sensation at all. Can you be open and curious to whatever the experience is? Be kind to yourself no matter what?
- You can notice your upper back. Your mid-back. And notice the sensations in your lower back as well, making sure to breathe. If thoughts crop up as you're doing this, worries, concerns, once again, see if you can let them go. Let them be like clouds floating in the sky. Moving across your mind. But don't take them so personally; just let them go, if possible. Or at the very least come back to my words, and this body scan.
- And bring your attention to the top of the chest area. And let yourself gently scan your chest down to the upper rib cage, into the stomach area. See if you can soften your stomach. Breathe more deeply, directing some breath into that area allowing it to soften and relax.
- You can notice your pelvis, the whole pelvic area. The places where your body connects with the bed. Feeling whatever sensations are present.
- And now gently bring your attention to your left hip. And we'll start to bring the awareness down our leg. Noticing the sensations in our thigh. You can circle your attention gently around the leg.
- Noticing whatever is obvious to you. Not forgetting to breathe. Bringing this kind and curious attention to your leg. And then to your knee and left calf, noticing whatever is present—vibration, tingling, heat, itching, warmth, coolness, heaviness. Let it be here whatever it is. And noticing your ankle, foot, and toes.
- There may be quite a bit of sensation in your feet. Possibly. Maybe not. Become aware of whatever is here for you.
- Now come back up to your right hip. Notice the sensations in your right hip. And again bring your attention down your right thigh. Feeling whatever is present.

- You can circle your attention or notice it in any other way that makes sense to you. Feeling the vibration and tingling, heat, heaviness, movement. Into your knee. And down to your leg, your calf, feeling the sensations present, scanning your body, and then down to your right ankle, foot, and toes.
- Now that you've scanned your body, you're welcome to start again. You can continue listening to the recording for another time, or you can continue on your own. This time if you wish, you can start at your feet. And go back up through your body till you get to the top of your head. Feel free to scan your body up and down as many times as it's helpful to you.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did you feel during the practice? How do you feel now? Were you able to let go of your thoughts to focus on your body? (If you would like to replay the practice a few times, that's okay.)

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Of all the mindfulness practices on offer, [the body scan](#) is the most popular—and it's a great introduction to mindfulness. Adults who regularly engage in the body scan report greater [psychological well-being](#) and [self-compassion](#), less [reactivity to stress](#), and a decrease in [depression](#).

And teachers who practice mindfulness for just a few weeks report a decrease in [burnout](#), [stress](#), [anxiety](#), and [depression](#). They also experience a range of physical [health](#) benefits, including better sleep quality.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

With only 47% of Americans reporting that they are [well-rested](#) during their work week, a good night's sleep can have a significant impact on [health](#), helping us to feel more rested, energized, and able to meet the needs of our students each day.

When work stress is high at school, we tend to get caught up in the stream of thoughts and feelings we experience, so it's crucial to take regular breaks to reboot our nervous systems. The body scan helps us to shift away from our thoughts to focus on physical sensations. Because the mind can only be aware of one thing at a time, a systematic, head-to-toe focus on the body can provide relief from a barrage of thoughts, slowly stabilizing our minds—helping us to drift off to sleep.

SOURCE

Mindful Meditations created by Diana Winston for the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center. www.uclahealth.org/marc ©2011- 2019, The Regents of the University of California. All Rights Reserved. "[A Body Scan Meditation to Help You Sleep](#)" was originally featured on www.mindful.org.