

Lesson 4

How To Reconnect with Your Body

Introduction

Ever wish that you could just sit, be with yourself, and be fully present?

Do you want to learn the ancient technique of tuning into your body and senses so you can train your mindfulness muscles and improve your attention?

The body scan is a key, formal mindfulness meditation practice. It helps bring awareness to your physical being.

If you'd like your mind and body to be in 'tip top' condition, the body scan is a great way to start.

Science

Experts tell us that one of the most effective ways to begin a mindfulness meditation practice is the body scan. By tuning into your body, you reconnect to your physical self. Any sensations you feel, you do so without passing judgement on them.

Mindfulness meditation, including the body scan, is different to relaxation approaches. It's about bringing your awareness to the present and accepting sensations, emotions and thoughts as they occur. In contrast, relaxation techniques aim to change your emotional state.

Mindfulness focuses on the here and now and interrupts your auto pilot of worrying and focusing on unpleasant memories. It can bring about a sense of relaxation as a coincidental benefit.

Value

Your body is available to you 24/7, so is an effective means of opening your mind and accepting your current bodily sensations, feelings and thoughts.

With a little effort, focusing on the body will improve your capacity to pay attention.

Increasing awareness of when your mind wanders during the body scan means that you'll be training your mind to gently redirect your awareness to the task in hand.

Tuning into your body means that you'll not be living in your head as much, getting caught up in thoughts and worries. You'll become an expert in sensing. Your tendency to overthink and overanalyse things will reduce.

Learning to accept any physical or emotional discomfort, or pain, will help you better manage it. Battling against it can sometimes exacerbate the symptoms. Accepting it means you'll reduce the discomfort's power over you, and any anxious thoughts that accompany it.

You'll appreciate your body more, being aware of its functions and the sensations it feels.

You'll become aware of the changing nature of life and not get as caught up and stuck on things you believe aren't changeable.

Exercise 'Practice with me: Body scan'

This exercise will take 5 minutes to complete.

Pausing to pay attention to ourselves in a formal and mindful way can do wonders for our mental wellbeing.

There are several formal practices to try, but today we're going to concentrate on the body scan.

We must remember that the body scan is not a relaxation exercise. We're not trying to become calm. The aim is to bring gentle attention to the moment-by-moment sensations we feel in our body. We can observe any thoughts that cross our mind, and any emotion we feel, but then gently redirect our focus to our sensory experiences. The body scan is often practiced lying down.

So, let's find a place that's quiet and where we can be comfortable and still for the next five minutes. We can lie down if we wish and allow the floor or bed to pull us into it, which we accept. We notice how different parts of our body make contact with the surface.

Opening our minds to how it feels to be inhabiting our body right now. Asking the question, how our body feels to be lying here? Is it heavy, light, warm, cool, soft, hard, achy, numb?

Just noticing our breath as we inhale, how our abdomen rises, and on the exhale, our stomachs moving in towards our spine. Allowing ourselves to flow with the rhythm of the breath.

Now directing our attention to each toe on our left foot, one at a time, noticing all the physical sensations, any tingling or warmth. We can choose to breathe into them on the breath in, and out of them on the breath out. If any thoughts cross our mind, we'll simply acknowledge that they're there, allowing them to be in the background of our experience, before gently redirecting our attention to the part of the body we're focusing on.

Now doing the same with the toes on our right foot.

Next, focusing on the soles of our feet, first the left, then the right, bringing gentle awareness to them.

Then working our way up through our left leg, up to the knee, then thigh, imagining scanning over the top of the knee and behind our knee, and thigh, noticing how they feel, without trying to change that.

Now doing the same with our right leg.

Then our hips, back, stomach, chest, arms, hands, neck, and finally head.

Now, breathing in awareness to our body as a whole, and letting go as we breathe out.

We might like to stretch now and open our eyes.

This body scan helps us simply check in with ourselves and gets us used to being comfortable in our own skin. Let's see if we can bring any of this heightened body awareness into the rest of our day.

Wrap

Tuning into your body can be difficult when you have a busy life and lots of intrusive thoughts. Every time you practise mindfulness meditation, such as the body scan, you're training your ability to attend to the present and not be as distracted by external or internal influences. You're interrupting the auto pilot that sometimes holds power over you and dictates what you think about and when.

Quietenning the mind through the body scan, allows you a time and space to bring awareness to the here and now. It enables you to see that things change constantly, and that's okay. You don't need to get caught up in any mental processes. You just need to lie down or sit, scan, and accept.

The body scan is an effective tool we all have at our disposal. We can use it to our advantage, and live a more harmonious life, filled with mindfulness goodness.

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We hope you've enjoyed our course on mindfulness.