

Body Scan: Checking In With Your Body

We often notice what is happening in our thoughts before we notice what is happening in our bodies. Stress, worry, fatigue, and other emotions can show up physically through tight muscles, changes in breathing, restlessness, discomfort, or other sensations.

A **body scan** is a mindfulness exercise that gives you time to slow down and notice what your body is experiencing. The goal is not to force yourself to relax or make uncomfortable sensations disappear. It is simply an opportunity to pay attention.

Why Practice a Body Scan?

Taking a few minutes to intentionally notice your body can help you become more aware of the connection between your physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions.

Body scan and mindfulness practices may also support:

- Relaxation and stress management
- Awareness of tension and discomfort
- Recognition of emotional and physical responses
- Greater awareness of your body's needs
- Mindful responses to uncomfortable sensations
- Rest and preparation for sleep

Every experience with a body scan can be different. Sometimes you may notice relaxation. Other times you may become aware of tension or sensations you hadn't noticed before. Both are part of becoming more aware of what your body is communicating.

A Simple Body Scan

Get Comfortable

Find a position that feels comfortable enough to remain in for several minutes. You can sit, lie down, or choose another position that works for you.

Notice Your Breathing

Take a moment to notice your natural breathing. Feel the movement that happens as you breathe in and breathe out. There is no need to change your breathing unless doing so feels comfortable.

Choose a Starting Point

Begin with one area of your body. You might start with your feet and move upward, begin at your head and work downward, or follow whatever order feels natural to you.

Notice What Is There

Bring your attention to that area.

What do you notice?

Perhaps there is warmth, coolness, pressure, tightness, tingling, heaviness, lightness, pain, comfort, or no noticeable sensation at all.

There is nothing specific that you need to find.

Stay Curious

Spend a little time noticing the area without deciding that the sensation is good or bad.

If you notice discomfort, also notice any thoughts or emotions that come with it. You don't have to change them. Simply recognize that they are there.

Breathe and Move On

Take a few comfortable breaths while keeping your attention on that part of your body. When you are ready, move your attention to another area.

Continue gradually through your body.

When Your Mind Wanders

Your attention will probably wander at some point. You might begin thinking about something you need to do, a conversation, a memory, or what is happening around you.

When you notice this, gently bring your attention back to the part of your body you were observing.

Wandering thoughts do not mean you are doing the exercise incorrectly. Noticing that your attention wandered is itself an act of awareness.

Finish With Your Whole Body

After you have moved through the different areas of your body, spend a few moments noticing your body as a whole.

Notice your breathing.

Notice where your body is supported.

Notice any areas that feel different from when you began.

Then gradually bring your attention back to your surroundings.

Making Body Scans Your Own

A body scan does not have to be long or performed in a particular position. You might spend several minutes doing a full scan or briefly check in with a few areas of your body during the day.

Try it:

- Before going to sleep
- During a stressful day
- After sitting or working for a long period
- When you notice yourself feeling tense
- As part of a regular mindfulness routine
- Whenever you want a quiet moment to check in with yourself

You can practice while sitting, lying down, standing, or spending quiet time outdoors.

There Is No Perfect Body Scan

Mindfulness is a practice, not a performance.

Some days it may be easy to focus. Other days your thoughts may wander repeatedly. You may feel relaxed after a body scan, or you may simply become more aware of how you are feeling.

Instead of asking, “**Did I do this right?**” consider asking:

“What did I notice?”

That awareness is the purpose of the exercise.

A Gentle Reminder

A body scan is a mindfulness and self-awareness practice and is not a replacement for medical or mental health care. If focusing on physical sensations or emotions causes significant distress, stop the exercise and consider discussing the experience with a qualified healthcare or mental health professional.