Body Scan

A Meditative Exercise to Help You Relax and Sleep

Select a comfortable place to sit or lie down. If your intention is to relax and re-energize, you should sit on the floor or in a chair with your back straight and erect and your hands resting on your lap. If your intention is to go to sleep, you should lie on your back with your hands by your side.

You can’t do this exercise wrong; it’s only natural that your attention will wander off at times. Just notice when this happens, and gently return to wherever we are in the exercise.

Start by focusing on your breathing. No need to change your breathing; just notice the breath as it flows naturally in and out. You may notice the sensation of the air coming in through your nose and out through your mouth. Or you may pay attention to how your stomach moves in and out with each breath.

Now bring your attention to your left foot. Notice the sensation of your shoe on your foot, or foot on the floor, scanning your attention over and through each of your toes, your arch and heel, up to your ankle. You may notice warmth, pressure, tingling sensations, whatever, just keeping your attention on your left foot. And now imagine your in-breath flowing through your left leg and into your foot and notice how the muscles relax on the out-breath. Breathe in and out of the left foot a few more times.

Now bringing your attention to your left lower leg, ankle to knee. Noticing the shin and calf, tuning into sensations there—warmth, tingling, tension, whatever is there, just noticing. And directing your breath into your left lower leg on the in-breath and relaxing on the out-breath.

Each time distracted, just returning to wherever we are in the exercise.

Now focusing on your left upper leg, knee to hip. Noticing sensations in the quadriceps and hamstring. Moving your awareness gently up your leg to your hip. Notice the sensation of your leg on the chair. Just tuning into sensations. Tension, tingling, whatever is there. Breathing into your left upper leg and relaxing on the out-breath.

*Repeat the progression now for the right leg, foot, lower leg, upper leg*

Notice both legs for a moment, resting your awareness on the length and width of them, scanning your awareness up and down both legs together.

Now focusing awareness on your left hand, scanning over each finger and thumb, palm and the back of your hand. Notice sensations in all those tiny muscles and joints. Whatever is there—warm or cold, tingling pain or tension—just noticing. Now imagining your in-breath going all the way down into your left hand and all the muscles relaxing on each out-breath.

Focusing attention now on your left forearm, wrist to elbow. Noticing sensations, whatever is there; breathing in and letting go.

Moving awareness to your left upper arm, elbow to shoulder and all the way to the back of your neck. Scanning over bicep and tricep, shoulder. Noticing sensations in left upper arm: warmth, tension tingling, soreness.
Whatever is there; now breathing into your left upper arm and allowing tension to melt away on each out-breath.

*Repeat progression for entire right arm, fingers to shoulder.*

Noticing both arms and legs now. Relaxed

Now becoming aware of your stomach moving in and out with each breath, not changing your breathing, just noticing movement. And scanning up your body to the chest and neck. Becoming aware of sensations in the front of your body. Breathing in and relaxing on each out-breath.

And now focusing attention on the base of your spine. Moving your awareness slowly up each vertebrae and out to each side. All the way up to the back of your neck. Noticing sensations in your back, whatever's there. Making room for pain or discomfort and focusing your in-breath and out-breath to the back. Visualizing tension melting away.

Now focusing your attention on a point between your eyebrows, at the top of your nose, and scanning your awareness over your forehead to your left and right temple. Focusing on your left cheek and right cheek. Softening your eyes and jaw. Allowing tension to melt away from all the muscles of your face and neck. Scanning your awareness up over your forehead and scalp to the back of your neck. Noticing the left and right sides of your head.

Noticing your whole head sitting firmly on your shoulders. Relaxed.

Now, finally, noticing your whole body. Scanning your attention slowly, gently from head to toe; down each of your arms to your fingers. Imagining each in-breath washing through your entire body and each out-breath letting go of tension. Just noticing the sensation of your entire body—heavy and relaxed.

And… To finish the exercise focusing again on your breathing. Noticing the sensation of the air in and out of your nose and mouth. Notice how your body moves with each in and out-breath.

Picturing the room around you in your mind's eye; and gently opening your eyes when you are ready.