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**MINDFULNESS PRACTICES: Observations on the body scan.**

While you may have heard about meditations that create out-of-body experiences, the object of the body scan is to have an “in-the-body” experience.

Body scan benefits include:[[1]](#endnote-1)

1. Helping you open the door to greater mindfulness of the body
2. Showing how you can use physical sensations as a key to your emotional state
3. Exploring how to work with physical pain

“While often practiced lying down, it’s important to recognize that the body scan is not a relaxation exercise—the point is not to feel calm (and particularly not *to try* to feel calm). The prime intention of a body scan is to incline the mind into sensory experience—to experience how it is to “be a body.” What we discover when we do this—mind wandering, tension, anxiety, boredom, peace, stillness, contentment, numbness, discomfort, irritation—is less important than our willingness to work with these arising phenomena gently and patiently, coming back to friendly attention each time we notice that the mind has drifted into thinking, or is buying into attachment or aversion. It can be especially helpful to practice the body scan with an attitude of “abandoning all hope of fruition.” Just like a scientist, see if you can carry out the experiment of the practice, and explore whatever results occur.” Ed Halliwell; Mindful magazine, 10/16

When we are reactive and/or on autopilot, we can lose touch and even ignore the body; we become insensitive to how the body is being affected by the environment and by our actions, thoughts and feelings. The body scan reverses this trend and allows us to be in tune with our bodies and become better able to respond from a place of wisdom and skill.

When we pay attention to the sensations in the body, we are stimulating regions of the frontal cortex that, over time, can help us regulate and balance our emotional response to stress and anxiety more rapidly. You are actually regulating your stress and anxiety by just paying attention to the body. David Vago, Ph.D.

Taking the time to really contemplate what an amazing thing our body is can generate a better sense of gratitude and appreciation for what we have. In and of itself, gratitude has a host of positive effects such as improved mental and physical health. But in the setting of the body scan, gratitude can also help overcome our self-defeating obsessions about how we view our bodies.

At first, we recognize an unpleasant thought, experience or emotion as a fused whole—it is hard to see the component parts. But exercises such as the body scan can help us better recognize the earliest signs of trouble, before our minds spiral into an undifferentiated lump of aversion. We can begin to break the cycle whereby a small displeasure rapidly triggers a full-blown ‘get me out of here’ reaction. We can see the component parts as they arise, and we can choose to bypass the knee-jerk reactions that tend to add to our suffering.

The Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA has [free meditations](https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mindful-meditations) including two body scans (3 minutes and 15 minutes). You can also download their app.

[Here](https://chrisgermer.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Compassionate-Body-Scan-Germer.m4a) is a Compassionate Body Scan practice from the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion (43 minutes).

1. <http://www.mbsrtraining.com/body-scan-benefits/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)