**First Week practices: Breathing and Body Scan**

Ok, so, are we ready to start?

We’ll start with the two most common practices that are foundational to Mindfulness: Breathing practices and Body Scanning. But before we do that, we need to talk about the Body.

**The Body in Mindfulness**

The Body is the support for Mindfulness; it’s the only thing you actually *need*. Most of our ideas of who we are come from the body, not only the physical inputs, but from our self-image. If we’re working to self-improve, we need the Body. If we’re working towards an improvement of society, we need to be in our best shape to do so.

In that sense, while I don’t think it is strictly necessary, I would recommend everyone who practices Mindfulness in general and this system of Mindfulness in particular engages in regular exercise and watches their diet.

You will become aware of your Body intensively during the practices. Therefore, we need to take good care of it.

Having done a quick intro to the importance of the Body, let’s focus on the first way that we are going to employ it: via sitting.

It is important that, especially at the beginning, you sit on either a chair or a cushion. A chair is going to be more comfortable if you do not have yoga practice. Either is fine and there’s no superior alternative. The main thing is that your back is straight, and you can remain there for some time.

Your Body position is going to be one of the keys to become Embodied Wisdom. It seems a detail, but further on you’ll see how important it is.

**Sitting in a Chair for Meditation**

Chair Position

* Choose a sturdy chair with a firm seat that allows your feet to rest flat on the floor.
* Sit forward on the chair, not leaning against the back if possible.
* If your feet don't reach the floor comfortably, place a cushion or folded blanket under them.

Body Positioning

* Place your feet hip-width apart, flat on the floor.
* Position your knees at approximately a 90-degree angle.
* Sit up on your sitting bones (ischial tuberosities), feeling them make firm contact with the chair.
* Align your spine vertically, maintaining its natural curves without forcing or exaggerating them.
* Roll your shoulders back and down gently to open your chest.
* Position your head so your ears align with your shoulders, chin slightly tucked.
* Rest your hands on your thighs, palms down for grounding or palms up for receptivity.

Common Adjustments

* If you experience back discomfort, place a small cushion or rolled towel at your lower back for support.
* For those with knee issues, adjust your seat height so knees are slightly lower than hips.
* If you need more stability, place your feet wider apart.
* For longer sessions, occasionally adjust your posture mindfully while maintaining awareness.

**Sitting on a Cushion for Meditation**

Cushion Setup

* Use a firm meditation cushion (zafu) or stack of firm pillows.
* Place the cushion on a mat, carpet, or folded blanket for knee comfort.
* Position yourself at the front third of the cushion to help tilt your pelvis forward.

Body Positioning

* Cross your legs in front of you in one of these positions:
  + Burmese position: both legs rest on the floor with one foot in front of the other
  + Half lotus: one foot rests on the opposite thigh
  + Full lotus: both feet rest on opposite thighs (most challenging)
* For easier positioning, try a simple cross-legged posture with knees lower than hips.
* Align your knees with your hips to form a stable triangular base.
* Stack your spine vertically above your sitting bones.
* Draw your lower belly in slightly to support your lower back.
* Let your shoulders relax away from your ears.
* Position your head so the crown points upward, chin slightly tucked.
* Rest your hands on your lap or on your knees, palms up or down.

Common Adjustments

* If your knees float well above the floor, use additional cushions or folded blankets under them for support.
* If experiencing hip discomfort, try a higher cushion or a meditation bench.
* For numb legs or feet, mindfully adjust your position or try a different leg arrangement.
* Consider alternating leg positions for longer sessions to distribute pressure.
* If back pain occurs, check that your pelvis is properly tilted forward, and your spine is aligned.

In both positions, remember that comfort supports sustainable practice. The ideal posture balances alertness with relaxation—stable enough to support awareness but comfortable enough to maintain for your chosen meditation duration.

Having covered the Body, let’s move onto the techniques.

**Breathing and Scanning: Background and Definitions**

Breathing exercises and body scans are two fundamental techniques in mindfulness and relaxation practices, helping individuals connect with their bodies, reduce stress, and promote a sense of calm and presence. Breathing exercises involve techniques that focus on controlling and being aware of your breath, anchoring attention to the present moment and inducing relaxation. A body scan, on the other hand, is a practice where you methodically focus your attention on different parts of your body, from head to toe, noticing any sensations, tension, or emotions without trying to change them, fostering greater body awareness.

These practices have roots in ancient meditation, particularly from Buddhism, but have been adapted for modern, secular use, notably through programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. They are accessible and can be done anywhere, making them ideal for busy lifestyles, and are supported by a growing body of scientific research.

**Let’s Breath Together: a guide to breathing patterns**

What Are Breathing Exercises?

Breathing exercises are techniques that focus on controlling and being aware of your breath, a cornerstone of mindfulness and meditation practices. They help anchor your attention to the present moment and induce a state of relaxation, often used to manage stress, anxiety, and improve focus.

Benefits of Breathing Exercises

Research suggests breathing exercises offer numerous benefits for both mental and physical health, as evidenced by various studies:

* Reduce Stress and Anxiety: Deep, controlled breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps lower heart rate and blood pressure, reducing feelings of stress and anxiety. A study by Roy et al. (2020) found mindful breathing can reduce burnout, cynicism, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety ([What is Mindful Breathing? Exercises, Scripts and Videos](https://positivepsychology.com/mindful-breathing/)).
* Improve Focus and Concentration: By concentrating on your breath, you train your mind to stay focused, which can enhance your ability to concentrate in other areas of life, supported by findings in mindful breathing exercises reducing overthinking ([Mindfulness Breathing Exercises: Guide to Techniques and Benefits](https://mindfulnessexercises.com/6-mindful-breathing-exercises/)).
* Enhance Sleep Quality: Regular practice can help you fall asleep faster and improve sleep quality, with a 2019 review suggesting mindfulness meditation may help reduce the impact of sleep issues ([Body Scan Meditation: Benefits and How to Do It](https://www.healthline.com/health/body-scan-meditation)).
* Boost Immune Function: Some studies suggest deep breathing can improve immune function by increasing the activity of certain white blood cells, as noted in research on mindful breathing reducing cortisol levels ([Mindfulness Breathing Exercises: Guide to Techniques and Benefits](https://mindfulnessexercises.com/6-mindful-breathing-exercises/)).

An unexpected detail is the potential to boost immune function, which may not be immediately associated with breathing exercises but is supported by physiological changes like reduced cortisol.

The two main patterns: Mindful Breath and 4-7-8 Breath

**Mindful Breathing (5 mins)**

To do a round of Mindful Breath, take your Body position.

* Relax your body: Close your eyes if you like, or keep them open with a soft gaze, and let go of any tension.
* Focus on your breath: Notice the air as it enters and leaves your body, feeling the sensations like the rise and fall of your chest.
* Manage distractions: If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breath without judgment.
* Set a time: Start with a few minutes and gradually increase as you get comfortable, using a timer if needed.

End the practice: Take a moment to notice how you (the Pic), then stretch or move before Journaling your experience and resuming your day.

Once you have enough practice, you can try the 4-7-8 breath.

**The 4-7-8 breath**

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is a simple, structured exercise designed to calm the mind and body by regulating your breath. Developed by Dr. Andrew Weil, a pioneer in integrative medicine, it’s based on pranayama, an ancient yogic breathing practice. It’s easy to learn and can be done anywhere, making it a handy tool for stress relief, better sleep, or a quick reset during a busy day.

How to Do It

Here’s a step-by-step guide to practicing the 4-7-8 breathing technique:

* Find a comfortable position: Sit with your back straight or lie down in a quiet place where you can focus.
* Prepare your breath: Rest the tip of your tongue against the roof of your mouth, just behind your front teeth, and keep it there throughout the exercise.
* Exhale fully: Breathe out completely through your mouth, making a gentle “whoosh” sound to empty your lungs.
* Inhale for 4 seconds: Close your mouth and breathe in quietly through your nose, counting to 4 in your head (1, 2, 3, 4).
* Hold for 7 seconds: Hold your breath, keeping your lungs full, and count silently to 7 (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
* Exhale for 8 seconds: Open your mouth slightly and exhale slowly through your mouth, making a “whoosh” sound, counting to 8 (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).
* Repeat the cycle: Do this 4 times total, keeping the rhythm steady—4 seconds in, 7 seconds hold, 8 seconds out.

**Body Scan**

A body scan is a mindfulness practice where you systematically focus your attention on different parts of your body, from head to toe, noticing any sensations, tension, or emotions without trying to change them. This practice helps develop greater body awareness and can be a powerful tool for relaxation and stress reduction, often used in meditation and therapy settings.

How to Perform a Body Scan

The following step-by-step guide is based on our system, but you also have a lot of resources like [How to Do a Body Scan Meditation](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/body-scan-meditation) and [Body Scanning Meditation: How To Practice, Steps, And Benefits](https://blog.zencare.co/body-scanning-a-therapy-tool-for-mindfulness-and-meditation/) to vary them (personally, I call the Body Scan the Supermarket line, since you need to account for everything):

1. Find a Quiet Space: Lie down on your back or sit in a comfortable position where you won't be disturbed.
2. Close Your Eyes: To minimize visual distractions and focus inward.
3. Start at the Top of Your Head: Imagine a wave of awareness moving down your body, beginning with your scalp and forehead.
4. Notice Sensations: As you focus on each part, notice any sensations such as warmth, coolness, pain, or numbness, without judgment.
5. Move Systematically: Proceed from your head to your neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, stomach, legs, and feet, spending a few breaths on each part.
6. Take Your Time: Spend 10-20 minutes, depending on your comfort level, ensuring you cover all areas without rushing.

**How to apply these techniques**

Incorporating breathing exercises and body scans into daily routines can have profound effects on mental and physical well-being. These practices are simple, accessible, and can be done anywhere, making them ideal for busy lifestyles. Start with short sessions, such as 5-10 minutes for breathing exercises and 10-20 minutes for body scans, and build up as you feel more comfortable.

A good start week could be constructed like this



If possible, try to have the sessions at the same time every day. If not, that’s ok, the important thing is that you get them done.

If you need to skip a day, that’s ok. But if you skip more than one, I would suggest that you begin again from day 1 until you get 7 days of uninterrupted practice, to cultivate the basics.

If you’d like more variations, resources like [Mindful Breathing | Practice | Greater Good in Action](https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/mindful_breathing) and [Body Scan Meditation - Headspace](https://www.headspace.com/meditation/body-scan) provide additional guidance and support.

Key Citations:

* [Mindful Breathing | Practice | Greater Good in Action](https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/mindful_breathing)
* [What is Mindful Breathing? Exercises, Scripts and Videos](https://positivepsychology.com/mindful-breathing/)
* [Breathing Exercises To Reduce Stress - Headspace](https://www.headspace.com/meditation/breathing-exercises)
* [Need to Chill? Try These 9 Breathing Exercises to Relieve Anxiety Quickly Now](https://www.verywellmind.com/abdominal-breathing-2584115)
* [How to Do a Body Scan Meditation](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/body-scan-meditation)
* [Body Scan Meditation: Benefits and How to Do It](https://www.healthline.com/health/body-scan-meditation)
* [Mental Body Scan: DBT Skills, Worksheets, Videos, Exercises](https://dialecticalbehaviortherapy.com/mindfulness/mental-body-scan/)
* [Mindfulness body scan](https://www.anxiousminds.co.uk/guide-to-mindfulness-body-scan/)
* [Body Scan Meditation - HelpGuide.org](https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/meditation/body-scan-meditation)
* [How to do a Full Body Scan for Mindfulness and Meditation - Centre of Excellence](https://www.centreofexcellence.com/mindfulness-meditation-full-body-scan/)
* [Body Scan Meditation - Headspace](https://www.headspace.com/meditation/body-scan)
* [The Body Scan Practice - Mindful](https://www.mindful.org/the-body-scan-practice/)
* [Body Scanning Meditation: How To Practice, Steps, And Benefits](https://blog.zencare.co/body-scanning-a-therapy-tool-for-mindfulness-and-meditation/)
* [Mindfulness Breathing Exercises: Guide to Techniques and Benefits](https://mindfulnessexercises.com/6-mindful-breathing-exercises/)