Guide to Well-Being

Tune in to your body, de-stress your mind, and open your heart
There’s no doubt that these are complex times. And no matter how deep your practice, you are being challenged. Challenged to maintain your health and well-being despite uncertainty, to find ways to create a sense of equilibrium amidst volatility, and savor joy even though the stresses of everyday life loom large.

But, you can’t force yourself to destress. You can’t grind yourself toward well-being. Instead, you have to allow yourself to unfurl, to soften. Trusting that there’s space all around you right now in this very moment—above your head, behind your back, on either side of you, straight out in front of you, and underneath you—space to expand into, to breathe into. Safe space to, as meditation teacher Frank Ostaseski says, welcome everything.

To begin the art of unfurling into well-being, we practice tuning in to the sensations of our body—to the felt sense of having a body that stores all of our stress and our pleasure, all of our worries and delights. As somatic awareness expert Jillian Pransky says, “We just need to give ourselves kind and friendly space to receive not only our first uncomfortable thought or feeling but every uncomfortable thought or feeling. If we can trust the ground to support us, we can open more fully to what we discover.”

I hope this special Guide to Well-Being inspires you to connect to your body, to nourish your senses, and to find new ways to rest, renew, and connect with joy. By practicing embodied awareness throughout your day, you can gain access to your deepest essential wisdom. That part of you that knows when you’ve taken on too much, or when you have plenty of room to stretch a little further—that inner voice that knows when the kindest thing you can say is nothing at all, or when silence might be complicity.

May you all find ways to tap into the wisdom within.

With deep love,

Heather Hurlock,
Editor-in-Chief
Mindful is pleased to present *How to Meditate*—an online course with psychologist and mindfulness teacher Elisha Goldstein that will help you discover peace, increase resilience, and develop a mindfulness practice that lasts.

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Take a moment to get out of your head

By Barry Boyce

When we think about meditating (with a capital M), we can get hung up on thinking about our thoughts: we’re going to do something about what’s happening in our heads. It’s as if these bodies we have are just inconvenient sacks for our brains to lug around.

Having it all remain in your head, though, lacks a feeling of good old gravity. That approach can make it seem like floating—as though we don’t have to walk. We can just waft.

But meditation begins and ends in the body. It involves taking the time to pay attention to where we are and what’s going on, and that starts with being aware of our body. That very act can be calming, since our body has internal rhythms that help it relax if we give it a chance.

Here’s a posture practice that can be used as the beginning stage of a period of medita-
tion practice or simply as something to do for a minute, maybe to stabilize yourself and find a moment of relaxation before going back into the fray. If you have injuries or other physical difficulties, you can modify this to suit your situation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Barry Boyce is a longtime meditator and meditation teacher. He is Founding Editor of Mindful and mindful.org and editor of and contributor to The Mindfulness Revolution.

1. Take your seat. Whatever you’re sitting on—a chair, a meditation cushion, a park bench—find a spot that gives you a stable, solid seat, not perching or hanging back.

2. If on a cushion on the floor, cross your legs comfortably in front of you. (If you already do some kind of seated yoga posture, go ahead.) If on a chair, it’s good if the bottoms of your feet are touching the floor.

3. Straighten—but don’t stiffen—your upper body. The spine has natural curvature. Let it be there. Your head and shoulders can comfortably rest on top of your vertebrae.

4. Situate your upper arms parallel to your upper body. Then let your hands drop onto the tops of your legs. With your upper arms at your sides, your hands will land in the right spot. Too far forward will make you hunch. Too far back will make you stiff. You’re tuning the strings of your body—not too tight and not too loose.

5. Drop your chin a little and let your gaze fall gently downward. You may let your eyelids lower. If you feel the need, you may lower them completely, but it’s not necessary to close your eyes when meditating. You can simply let what appears before your eyes be there without focusing on it.

6. Be there for a few moments. Relax. Now get up and go about your day. And if the next thing on the agenda is doing some mindfulness practice by paying attention to your breath or the sensations in your body, you’ve started off on the right foot—and hands and arms and everything else.
It's important to be active, whether you are an athlete or not, but it's also important to take more time to listen to your body. If you have a pain in your body—whether it's tendonitis, a headache, or a cramp—don't struggle to get past it. Stop and listen to your body, surrender to being with what is. Ask yourself: “What is the lesson for me to learn here? Have I been overdoing it? Have I been going too hard or too long?”

Your body is like a circuit breaker. Injury is its way of protecting you and telling you to change something. Learn to listen and to trust that still, small voice inside, the voice of self-knowing. You may slow down in the short run, but it will keep you far healthier and more active in the long run.

And as you learn to practice listening deeply to yourself and to your body, not only will it help you move more mindfully, you will find that this habit of listening deeply will have other benefits, beyond the physical. You can listen better to others, whether it’s your boss, your partner, your child, or your teammate. When you really listen to a person without judging or interrupting, it may feel as though you’re hearing them for the first time.

1. Ask yourself at least one challenging question each day. For example:

What makes me uncomfortable in my physical activity? Why? Where do my discomforts come from? How do they hold me back or move me forward?

What do I crave? What do I worry about?

Which emotion is most, and least, comfortable for me: Anger? Fear? Guilt? Anxiety?

Where does my stress live?
Why is this particular stress inhabiting my body?

2. Take some time and listen to your body when you ask these questions. Don’t just answer with your mind. If you listen to your body, it will answer you.

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Move your feet

By Mindful Staff

The most basic form of mindful movement, walking meditation is a well-established form for bringing attention into action.

Walking is one of our greatest gifts, and when early in life we start using our legs to get around, it’s cause for celebration. The very fact that walking—or whatever form of ambulation you use to get around—is so central to our lives makes it a ready focus for mindful, meditative attention.

Here is a set of instructions for a classic form of walking meditation of the kind used in formal meditation sessions. The key is to focus on the sensations of movement. When we place our attention on the foot, for example, it’s not on the thought of our foot, rather the actual sensation.

The variations at the right offer ways of doing walking meditation that are more tightly or broadly focused, including some that we do outside, which makes it easier for mindful movement to spill over into our everyday habits.

1. Stand up STRAIGHT with your back upright but not stiff. Feel your feet touching the ground and let your weight distribute evenly.

2. Curl the THUMB of your left hand in and wrap your fingers around it. Place it just above your belly button. Wrap your right hand around it, resting your right thumb in the crevice formed between your left thumb and index finger. (This creates some balance for you and keeps your swinging arms from being a distraction.)

3. Drop your GAZE slightly. This helps you maintain focus.

4. Step out with your left FOOT. Feel it swing, feel the heel hit the ground, now the ball, now the toes.

5. FEEL the same as you transfer your weight and the right foot comes forward.

6. Walk at a STEADY pace, slightly slower than in daily life but not funereal. When your attention wanders, bring it back to the sensations of your feet touching the ground.
Walking Practice Variations

1. Very Slow
In this more closely focused variation on the practice at left, be like a cat stalking its prey. Maintain a steady gaze. Inhaling, shift weight to the left foot. Exhaling, slowly advance the right one half step, heel then toes. Grip the floor. Continue.

2. Normal: Urban
Meditation right in the middle of your world! At a normal pace, let your arms swing naturally, follow a set path to keep focus, and limit interaction with others. Open your senses.

3. Normal: Nature
Who needs encouragement to walk in nature? We just forget to do it. Same as the urban walk, except the sensory environment is more restorative. Try it barefoot.

4. Aimless Wandering
Find a field or meadow, preferably not too populated. The point here is to walk without a fixed destination. You may stop from time to time to take in something that catches your eye or ear or nose or skin.

5. Wheelchair
If you use a cane, walker, or wheelchair to get around, simply shift your full attention to the sensations of movement: the grip of your hands, the movement of your arms, the feeling of being propelled.
Yoga, mindfulness, and somatic awareness expert Jillian Pransky shows how tuning in to your body can unwind tension, de-stress the mind, and open your heart.

BY KELLE WALSH
When you really pay attention to your breath, it’s astonishing how much you notice. As I follow the sensation of cool air flowing into my nose, I feel a gentle expansion, a widening through my nasal cavity, back into my skull, and down my throat. My collarbones rise and spread; my ribs separate and widen like a bellows.

Exhaling, my diaphragm contracts into the cave of my abdomen, my spine curling ever so slightly around it. All the while, my body feels as if it’s sinking into the floor. My mind follows the gravitational pull, its perpetual whirl slowed to a pleasant hum.

This single breath cycle takes less than 20 seconds, but an hour could easily have passed. It occurs to me that it’s like that movie Interstellar—as if I’ve left the normal time–space continuum and awakened to a whole new world of sensation inside, as I lie here, covered in blankets, a weighted pillow across my hips, drinking in this wildly restorative substance called air.

I’m not normally so observant of my breath. But I’m following Jillian Pransky’s voice, a bit raspy, slow and clear and incredibly relaxing. She’s guiding me through her signature Deep Listening practice, which, in this moment, I could honestly describe as liquefying. As in, it feels like my muscles have separated from my bones and both are suspended in some viscous substance called air.

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“Let your breath arrive in your body,” Pransky says, and if I could, I would nod in assent: I think it’s here. But I really don’t think I can move. And then a tiny thought bubble rises up from the deep: Thank goodness I don’t have to drive right away.

I’ve come to meet Pransky to experience her body-based relaxation system that blends yoga, mindfulness, and somatic awareness into a delicious low-tech stew—a nourishing and welcome response to our hyper-connected and overstimulated lives. It might just be the antithesis of popular modern yoga styles—no overheated room, no endless Chaturangas-to-Up-Dog vinyasas, no orders to inhale! exhale!

Instead we move slowly and deliberately, warming up with a few gentle poses. With calm assurance, she is beginning to direct our inner attention to how we hold ourselves in our bodies, before we head back to lie down on our mats, surrounded and comforted by the support of bolsters and blankets. As we lie in postures designed to encourage the gentle release of tight and shortened muscles, we “receive” the breath as it enters the body. Then, we mentally trace where our feet, legs, back, arms, and head touch the floor, like kids making body outlines they’ll later paint in art class, and imagine expanding the imprint with our awareness.

We invite the breath to meet any hard or stuck places in the body, washing over and around them like water, releasing the tension and pain held there. In a contemplation she calls Making Space, Pransky gently urges, “Let yourself be opened by your breath.”

Welcome the breath with a receptive belly. Your breath will gently unravel the tension it meets. Your breath will tenderly expand you inside. Allow your breath to unwind you, unfurl you.
Imagine you could breathe directly through your heart. Imagine this is where the air flows in and out of you.

Let your breath flow freely in and out through your heart. Let your breath soften you. Uncovering layers of you. Allowing room for you to unfurl. All of you.

Your breath tenderly receiving everything it comes in contact with. Welcoming your deepest feelings openly, unwaveringly. Welcoming all your feelings. Your joys and your sorrows.

Your breath is a gentle listening space. Your breath listens wholeheartedly to all that it meets, staying with you no matter what arises. Your breath is always present. Always listening.

Listen to your infinite breath as it flows in and out of your heart. Your breath will teach you how to listen.

Listen softly. Listen to yourself as your breath listens to you.

—Jillian Pransky
From Go-Go-Go to Slow-Slow-Slow

Twenty years ago a different yoga attracted Jillian Pransky. A different life. Absorbed in a busy marketing career with a major publishing house in Manhattan, she was a go-getter, a climber, focused on success and her ability to create it. “Jillian the Achiever. Jillian the Tenacious. Jillian the Succeeder,” she writes in her 2017 book *Deep Listening*. “All the foundational ideas I had about myself were validated by my job.”

She was also athletic, pushing herself through any physical challenge. She played soccer throughout school, and as an adult she taught aerobics in addition to her day job. She tells how she began running, proudly finishing a five-mile race soon after. Then someone suggested she should run a marathon, so she did...just five months later. “Because I had cultivated a mind-over-matter attitude, I was actually able to cross the finish line,” she writes. “But then I was sick for a year. I had pushed myself too much, although I didn’t make that connection at the time.”

When she discovered yoga, it became an obsession. She practiced at the studio across from her Flatiron Building office at lunchtime and again after work. She became certified to teach, and started doing that in her off hours. “I loved how powerful my body felt when I practiced yoga,” she writes. “I loved the sensations of openness and expansiveness when challenging my physical boundaries. I did headstands so I could feel mighty and successful and strong.”

Then her world turned upside down. Her beloved sister-in-law, Lisa, was diagnosed with lung cancer, and died just three years later. The shock of it deeply impacted Pransky; alongside the pain and loss a harrowing truth was revealed, she writes: “We are not really in control of our life.”

Not long afterward she experienced her first panic attack, sending her to the emergency room and followed by the development of debilitating fears. “I was scared to ride the subway, scared to fly in a plane,” she writes. “I felt as if I were forever running away from danger.”

The yoga that had made her feel strong and powerful didn't help. “In the wake of Lisa’s death, I suffered from both anxiety and exhaustion. As my health faltered, I realized that the yoga practice I had created to make myself feel solid and secure was not the type of practice I needed to become a more active participant in my own well-being.”

Somewhat ironically, it was a yoga class that changed the trajectory of her practice, and as it would turn out, of her entire life. During Savasana, the finishing “corpse” pose where you simply rest in meditation and allow the practice to sink in, she became aware of how hard she was working, and how frustrated she was that her teacher did not acknowledge her efforts during class. An uncomfortable realization began to dawn on her: Underneath all her pushing was a pervasive longing for approval, a deep desire to be “seen.”

“It was one of the big pivotal moments for me that made me ask, *Why do I push so hard?*” she says.

That realization prompted an exploration to understand her need to be recognized and validated, why she drove herself to exhaustion and even to the point of illness. She dove deeply into the study of somatic therapy, structural and functional anatomy, and mindfulness. She worked with a Gestalt therapist, “starting to peel the onion” of her personal history, discovering how a troubled relationship with her chronically ill and volatile father fueled much of her drive. “With my training in yoga and somatic therapy, I had tools available to work with to go deeper, and to finally listen.”

Our Stressed Minds and Bodies

Pransky understands firsthand the stress faced by the people who come to her classes and workshops. She recognizes those driven by ambition, those buckling under the weight of their responsibilities or barely balancing on the edge of overwhelm. And she knows well the anxiety that lies just beneath the surface. Anxiety about the future or what’s on the news. About keeping their jobs or about their kid getting an F and whether he’ll get into college.

“I have rarely met someone who doesn’t say they’re somewhere on the spectrum of anxiety,” Pransky says. →
PRACTICE

Letting Go of Tension

Helping the psoas muscle to release tension, to lengthen to its optimal state, is an important step in deep listening, according to Jillian Pransky. This is done through supported long-held poses that open the front of the hips, and by welcoming the breath into the body.

The psoas is the longest and strongest of the hip-flexor muscles, connecting the lumbar vertebrae to the femur on both sides of your body. It helps stabilize the spine and support your internal organs, while supporting the movement of blood and lymph through your cells. It’s involved with almost every motion, from bending to twisting to walking and running. And, it’s intimately connected to the breath, sharing space with the diaphragm and contracting when you feel afraid or stressed. Sitting for long periods of time, excessive movement, or any repetitive motion that compresses the front of the hip, contracts and shortens the psoas.

“Our gut environment has to feel safe. If it’s squeezed because of our six-pack abs, if it’s squeezed because we don’t want to feel it, if it’s squeezed because the psoas is short, as it is constantly from walking and riding and running and driving and sitting, then all of that inhibits our ability to calm ourselves,” she says.

“When the belly can soften, when we provide a place for the breath to move at ease, we create an environment where we can feel more, know more, receive more guttural, preverbal cues that inform us on what would really be most wise. Insight and wisdom are then available in a way that they’re not when we’re rushing around and not seeing a bigger perspective.”

—Kelle Walsh
She also hears the opposite, she says, when people believe “stress is their friend.” She relays the story of a former client, the founder of a big nonprofit who began working with her after an accident left him unable to use his legs. “He said, ‘I haven’t felt this at ease and this relaxed in, like, I forget. I forgot this place,’” she recalls. But just two sessions later, he told her he couldn’t continue. “He was overwhelmed with the possibility of what real relaxation would mean for him,” she says. He told her, “It’s going to make me lose my edge. If I relax too much, how am I going to have the command and respect that I need to do what I do?”

She was able to convince him to continue, but she recognizes how difficult it was for him “to get over to that place where relaxation didn’t mean surrender, loss of power.” Instead, she says, he learned how it could help him be “more deliberate about how he used his energy, and how he took his rest, so he could be less reactionary and more purposeful.”

Uncovering Tension

Whether we consciously choose to hold tension or our bodies and minds do it for us, when we do, Pransky says, we feel in control. “When we relax, we feel vulnerable.”

Tension becomes our armor, holding the fear, worry, and vulnerability at bay. But eventually, inevitably, it fails us. With stress hormones coursing through our bloodstream, as we hold ourselves so tightly to stay “safe” that we forget to take a deep breath, we’re just one fender bender, one work crisis, one sad and senseless loss away from falling apart. That’s when we get sick. Or stop sleeping through the night. Or blow our stack at someone we love, or suffer a panic attack and become afraid to live our lives.

Before we can release tension, however, we have to know where we hold it. And it’s not always obvious where it resides, Pransky says. “We’re so used to living with it, we think we are relaxed while, in fact, we are still harboring tension.”

Lying with my head and back supported by a bolster, my mind idly following my breath as it moves through my limp body, I’m suddenly aware of a sensation of opening deep in my core, and →

Soft Belly Breathing

Sit in a comfortable position on the floor or in a chair. Close your eyes, if you wish. Take a few long breaths, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth.

Let your body land on the ground. Let your breath arrive in your body.

As your breath flows in, feel it move down into your belly. As your breath flows out, let your belly be effortless.

On your inhale, think, “soft,” allowing your belly to receive your breath.


Inhale, “soft.”

Exhale, “belly.”

Each inhale, imagine your belly being cared for by the breath. Each exhale, let the breath loosen any solidity. Let your breath make room. Let thoughts, emotions, sensations rise and fall in and out of a spacious belly.

Since our belly is our emotional center, when we soften it, a variety of feelings, thoughts, images, and memories may bubble up. Welcome all that rises and falls. If you find yourself in conversation with a thought or feeling, simply acknowledge that observation, meet yourself kindly, and draw your mind gently back to the flow of your breath.

After 5 to 10 minutes, place your hands on your belly. Feel your breath meeting your hands. Little by little, expand your awareness into the space around you.

Close your practice by setting an intention to stay connected to your breath and your belly as you move slowly out of the meditation.

—Jillian Pransky
Open Sky

Use this reset practice while looking at an open sky.

Stand outside or in front of a window, or gaze at a photograph that features an expansive sky.

Pause and sense where your body meets the ground. Soften excess gripping in your face, neck, and shoulders. Feel yourself landing completely.

As you bring your attention to the flow of your breath, gaze into the openness of the sky.

Follow your next three breaths as they come in from the space around you and expand into your body. Follow them as they move from the space inside you back out into the world around you.

Notice the continuum of your breathing flowing from outside in and inside out.

Feel how your breath connects you to the space around you.

To finish, notice your feet on the floor and imagine your head—and your heart—in the shape of the sky. Move into your next moment grounded and open.

—Jillian Pransky
something seems to shift within. As my breath sinks into this new space, I feel a sense of sadness. I feel how weary I am. I’ve been traveling for almost two weeks, and it’s been emotional, visiting with older family members and coming face-to-face with how much has changed, and how much more change is still to come. I’ve spent hours on planes and trains and in cars, and I haven’t done any yoga or much exercise at all. I’m ready to go home, but some things there too are uncertain. I miss my dog.

“Just welcome the breath,” Pransky is saying, and as the emotions fill me, I’m grateful for this guidance. I touch the sadness lightly with my breath, exploring its shape and size, its texture and density. After what could be a few moments or an hour, it starts to grow lighter, thinner, and more transparent, until...it’s gone. I feel lighter, my mind suddenly alert, yet my body is still deeply relaxed.

Wow.

This experience is why Pransky is a proponent of pairing mindfulness with somatic awareness. When we engage in restorative poses, opening the anatomy and welcoming the breath deeply into the body, we not only trigger the relaxation response, we uncover those deeper areas of tightness and holding. And as we just notice, just rest, just listen, we offer ourselves a great kindness that makes us feel cared for. “It sends our mind a signal that right now, in this moment, we’re OK,” she says.

She describes it like a plane coming in for a landing. Before the plane can touch down, the pilot needs to receive a message: “Welcome! It’s safe to land here.” Having the embodied sense of being supported by the ground, of being safe in our own bodies, we can start to lay down the armor of tension. “And our mind can begin to shift into a new conversation: ‘I’m OK here on the ground.’”

“The more familiar we are with how and where we hold tension, the easier it is to notice “how we are closing down or opening up to the current conditions in our lives,” she says.

This is where Deep Listening becomes a tool for life. We’re building resilience “over time, making more space and capacity to stay open with whatever arises.”

The Power of Softness

Releasing our tension requires softness.

It does not require knowing all the answers to whatever may come up. We don’t need to figure everything out. We just need to give ourselves kind and friendly space to receive not only our first uncomfortable thought or feeling but every uncomfortable thought or feeling. If we can trust the ground to support us, we can open more fully to what we discover. It’s like allowing our breath to come in. We don’t have to do anything. We simply need to welcome it.

—Jillian Pransky in Deep Listening

When she teaches, Pransky uses cues, simple words or phrases that seem to bypass thinking and land right in your body. She talks of a “spacious belly” and “effortless legs.” She asks you to “imagine the breath flowing in through the front of your heart and out through the back of your heart. Washing through your chest. Softening you.”

And she refers to the body, breath, and the earth as “family.” During our session, as I lay in repose, no tension left anywhere, this notion immediately hits me as so simple and beautiful and true that I feel my heart melt. No matter what else is going on, these things—the breath, the body, and the solid support of the earth itself—are always there, steady and real, for every single one of us.

“Similar to the way we learn to rely on the support of the ground, becoming aware of our partnership with the breath reinforces our experience of connectedness. Of not feeling alone,” Pransky explains. “The breath is always there for us, without question. It is our life partner. Really, it’s family.”

And this feeling of belonging, of safety, helps you to stay soft. To stay open. To let in the good while knowing that you are also strong and stable, supple and responsive to whatever comes. You are listening, deeply.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelle Walsh is a journalist who specializes in health and wellness. She writes and edits from Boulder, Colorado, where she loves running trails, doing yoga, and trying to learn to ski.
“Releasing our tension requires softness. It does not require knowing all the answers to whatever may come up. We don’t need to figure everything out.”

—JILLIAN PRANSKY
Balance & breathe

Here’s a series of simple postures and movements you can use as part of a sitting meditation session—or anytime.

By Cyndi Lee

This sequence emphasizes balance: on your hands, hands and knees, and standing on one leg, as well as when moving the spine in all directions—forward, backward, and sideways. It’s great to do whenever you want to cultivate balance and presence in your body/mind: first thing in the morning or last thing before going to bed or anytime in between. It takes about five minutes, but feel free to repeat the entire sequence or any section as much as you like.

As you move through it, notice when your mind strays, and return to the sensation of the breath or any other physical sensation, such as stretching, quivering, or your muscles tiring. That’s how you’ll know when to push and when to back off.

It’s particularly useful to do this sequence before meditation practice as it will create both strength, flexibility, and stamina that will support the physical effort required for sitting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cyndi Lee is the founder of OM Yoga and author of May I Be Happy: A Memoir of Love, Yoga, and Changing My Mind.
STANDING UP  Step back your right hand, then step back your left hand, and then shift onto your feet and stand up. As always, as your attention strays come back to attending to the physical sensations.

CHAIR POSE  Inhale arms up and bend your knees into a chair pose—two movements at the same time!

Is your mind still in your body? In the room? Gently let it come back.

SHOULDER ROTATIONS  Extend your arms out to the side. Inhale and roll your arms so your palms face up. Exhale and roll arms in, palms back. Begin this action from the shoulders, letting your pinky fingers be the last part to roll up and down.

LEG BENDS  As you exhale, stand up on your left leg, right leg bent. Return to chair pose and repeat on the other side. Go right and left, 5-10 times.

SIDE BENDS  Inhale arms up. Exhale, bend to the right. Inhale up and exhale bend to the left. Pay attention to the movements from side to side, as well as the position of your head.

STAND QUIETLY  Remain still, keeping your eyes open. Notice what you are seeing. Ground yourself in your environment. Feel your feet on the floor. Observe your breath moving.

You can repeat this entire sequence. Feel free to do it as often as you like.
Enjoy every mouthful

By Carley Hauck

It’s easy enough to reduce eating to a sensation of bite, chew, and swallow. Who hasn’t eaten a plateful of food without noticing what they’re doing? Yet eating is one of the most pleasurable experiences we engage in as human beings, and doing it mindfully can turn eating into a far richer experience, satisfying not just the need for nutrition, but more subtle senses and needs. When we bring our full attention to our bodies and what we are truly hungry for, we can nourish all our hungers. Try this:

1. **Breathe before eating.** We often move from one task right to the other without pausing or taking a breath. By pausing, we slow down and allow for a more calm transition to our meals. Bring your attention inward by closing your eyes, and begin to breathe slowly in and out of your belly for eight to 10 deep breaths before you start your meal.

2. **Listen to your body.** After breathing, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your belly. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being that you don’t feel any physical sensation of hunger and 10 being that you feel very hungry, ask yourself “How hungry am I?” What physical sensations tell you that you are hungry or not hungry (emptiness in stomach, shakiness, no desire to eat, stomach growling, etc.)? Try not to think about when you last ate or what time it is, and really listen to your body, not your thoughts.

3. **Eat according to your hunger.** Now that you are more in touch with how hungry you are, you can more mindfully choose what to eat, when to eat, and how much to eat. This simple practice can help you tune in to your real needs.

4. **Practice peaceful eating.** At your next meal, slow down and continue to breathe deeply as you eat. It’s not easy to digest or savor your food if you aren’t relaxed.

5. **If you don’t love it, don’t eat it.** Take your first three bites mindfully, experience the taste, flavors, textures, and how much enjoyment you are receiving from a certain food. Make a mindful choice about what to eat based on what you really enjoy.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**
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Activate your mind and your muscles

By Cara Bradley

Riding a bike, lifting weights, sweating it out on a treadmill—what do such exercises have in common? For one thing, each can be a mindfulness practice. Whatever the physical activity—dancing the Tango, taking a swim—instead of simply working out to burn calories, master a skill, or improve condition, you can move and breathe in a way that not only gets your blood pumping and invigorates every cell in your body, but also shifts you from feeling busy and distracted to feeling strong and capable.

Ready? The following steps, good for any activity, will help you synchronize body, mind, and nervous system. As you do, you will strengthen your capacity to bring all of your energy to the task at hand.

1. **Be clear about your aim.** As you tie your laces or pull on your gardening gloves, bring purpose to your activity by consciously envisioning how you want to guide your session. As you climb on your bike you might say, "I am going to breathe deeply and notice the sensation of the breeze and the sun and the passing scenery." As you enter the pool, you might say, "I'm going to pay attention to each stroke, and the sound and feel of the water surrounding me."

2. **Warm up** (5 minutes). Try any simple moves—jumping jacks, stretching—and concentrate on matching the rhythm of your breath to your movement. By moving rhythmically, your brain activity, heart rate, and nervous system begin to align and stabilize.

3. **Settle into a rhythm** (10 to 15 minutes). Pick up the intensity, but continue to coordinate your breath and movement. If you have trouble doing this, then simply focus on your breathing for a few minutes. Eventually you'll find your groove.

4. **Challenge yourself** (10 to 15 minutes). Try faster speed, more repetitions, or heavier weights, depending on what you are doing. Notice how alert and alive you feel when pushing yourself.

5. **Cool down** (5 minutes). Steadily slow down your pace until you come to a standstill. Notice the way your body feels. Drink in your surroundings.

6. **Rest** (5 minutes). Quietly recognize the symphony of sensations flowing in and around you. Practice naming what you feel and sense. Chances are you'll feel awake and alive from head to toe.
Get grounded

By Susan Bauer-Wu

When was the last time you noticed how your body was feeling? Not just when you have a headache or you’re tired or you have heartburn after that spicy taco you ate for lunch. But just noticing how your body is feeling right now, while you’re sitting or standing or lying down. How about noticing how your body feels while you’re sitting in an important meeting or walking down the street or playing with your children?

In our busy, high-tech, low-touch lives, it’s easy to operate detached from our own bodies. They too easily become vessels we feed, water, and rest so they can continue to cart around our brains. We don’t pay attention to the information our bodies are sending us or the effect that forces such as stress are having—until real health problems set in.

Let’s take a small and simple step in the direction of paying our body the attention it is due. Consider spending just a few minutes—every day, if you can—to notice your own physicality. Not to judge your body or worry about it or push it harder at the gym, but to be in it.

Here’s an easy body-scan practice to try. It will tune you in to your body and anchor you to where you are right now. It will heighten your senses and help you achieve greater levels of relaxation. You can do it sitting in a chair or on the floor, lying down, or standing.

1. **Settle into a comfortable position,** so you feel supported and relaxed.
2. **Close your eyes** if you wish or leave them open with a soft gaze, not focusing on anything in particular.
3. **Rest for a few moments,** paying attention to the natural rhythm of your breathing.
4. Once your body and mind are settled, **bring awareness to your body as a whole.** Be aware of your body resting and being supported by the chair, mattress, or floor.
5. **Begin to focus your attention** on different parts of your body. You can spotlight one particular area or go through a sequence like this: toes, feet (sole, heel, top of foot), through the legs, pelvis, abdomen, lower back, upper back, chest, arms down to the fingers, shoulders, neck, different parts of the face, and head.
6. **For each part of the body,** linger for a few moments and notice the different sensations as you focus.
7. The moment you notice that your mind has wandered, **return your attention** to the part of the body you last remember.

If you fall asleep during this body-scan practice, that’s okay. When you realize you’ve been nodding off, take a deep breath to help you reawaken and perhaps reposition your body (which will also help wake it up). When you’re ready, return your attention to the part of the body you last remember focusing on.

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Ease into a restful night
By Shelby Freedman Harris

As someone who works every day with patients struggling with insomnia, the most common thing I hear is once the head hits the pillow, the brain doesn’t stop. They know sleep should come, but the brain just wants to think about both pressing and mundane things, such as reviewing the day’s events and tasks that need to be completed.

When we lose awareness of the present moment, our minds get stuck in maladaptive ways of thinking. For example, you might be trying to go to sleep but your mind gets lost thinking about all the groceries you need to buy. Deep, relaxed breathing is forgotten. And once you realize sleep isn’t happening, your muscles tense and your thought process quickly shifts to “I’m not falling asleep! I have XYZ to do this week and I won’t be able to function tomorrow.” The body seizes up, breathing and heart rate can both quicken, and falling sleep becomes more difficult.

Newer models of insomnia treatment are beginning to incorporate mindfulness. Here’s a grounding exercise to help you get some quality shut-eye.

1. Dim the lights 1 hour before bedtime. Start winding down the brain and body by dimming the lights. Engage in relaxing activities outside the bedroom that pass the time quietly.

2. Avoid looking at anything with a screen. Stow away your tablet, phone, computer, and TV for the night—the light can keep you awake and alert.

3. Ten minutes before bedtime, begin a focused mindfulness exercise. Sit in a comfortable chair in the same dimly lit room. Imagine the outline of your body and slowly trace it in your head. Keep in mind the amount of pressure you’re feeling against the chair or the ground and be mindful of where there’s more pressure and where there’s less. Start with your head. Is it touching the back of the chair? How heavy does it feel against the chair, wall, or just the air? Then slowly move down to your ear, then shoulder, arm, and leg. Work down to your feet and then back up the other side of your body. Take about five minutes for this exercise.

4. If your mind begins to wander, notice that it wandered and get back on track. Try to avoid judging yourself—your mind will indeed wander; the skill lies in getting it back on track.

5. Get in bed and focus on your breath. If you are unable to fall asleep, get up, sit in the comfortable chair again and repeat the exercise. Don’t get back into bed until you’re sleepy—and don’t sleep in the chair!

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Play!
By Maira Kalman

Stop Everything.
Stop Everything.
Go outside for a slow, silent walk.
Preferably in a place with trees.
The point? To allow incessant worries to dissolve. To have a peaceful mind.
An empty brain.
You have to be an idiot not to want an empty brain. It allows so many good thoughts and ideas to arise.

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