

SHEET 3 Body scan

The following exercise allows you to focus on different parts of your body to help you let go of tension and truly relax.

- Find a comfortable position to sit or lie in. Read through the steps below, and then in your mind go through each part in your own time. Pause after each step; don't race through. Don't worry about getting it exactly right; you just need to get the general idea.
- Start by paying attention to your breath, noticing the in breath and the out breath and how it feels in your body.
- Then gently bring your attention to your feet. Notice how your right foot feels; does it feel light or heavy, warm or cool, tense or relaxed? Can you feel the sensation of the air or your clothing against your skin? Does your right foot feel the same as the left or does it feel different? Just notice, don't judge. Now pay attention to your right foot in the same way.
- Now gently bring your attention to your legs. Notice how your right leg feels. Can you feel the sensation of your leg against the floor? Can you feel the air, the temperature, heaviness or lightness, the texture of your clothes? Do both legs feel the same or does one feel different from the other?
- Now bring your awareness to your hips and buttocks. Feel them resting against the floor. Notice any tightness, heaviness, lightness and sensations of warmth or coolness.
- Now your spine, your low back and your upper back; gently draw your attention to them in the same way, noticing the sensations, just observing.
- Now notice the other parts of your body in the same way: your belly, your chest, your arms, shoulders, neck and head. Observe the sensations in these body parts.
- Now bring your attention to your body as an integrated whole. Observing the breath once more, feel the in breath flowing to all parts of your body, bringing energy, warmth and light to each area. On the out breath feel any pain, tension, stress or negativity flowing out with the breath.
- If you feel any pain or tension in any body areas, just notice the sensation and be aware of the whole of your body at the same time. Don't grab onto the pain or focus on it. Don't try and distract yourself from the pain. Just be aware and spread the sensation out through your whole body. Breathe the pain out on your exhale and draw warmth and light in on the inhale.
- When you are ready to return to the room, start to gently bring yourself back by wiggling a finger or a toe. Then open your eyes and lie or sit quietly for a while, absorbing your experience. Tune into the sight and sounds in the room, any smells, the feeling of your body against the floor, any noises. Tune into your body and notice how you feel and whether this is different from how you felt at the beginning of the session.
- Any time during the day you feel stressed, anxious or out of control, take yourself back in your mind to the sensory experience of how you felt at the end of the session, e.g. the sights, sounds, smells and physical sensations.

Lots of people get the wrong idea about meditation and relaxation, thinking that it has to be done in an ideal perfect posture. Yet striving for the perfect posture or battling against discomfort can take away from the point of the practice. The Buddha himself said that meditation flows through all 'four postures' of walking, sitting, standing and lying down. Good meditation posture is the position in which you can happily stay still and steady.

Reclining postures

For many people lying down is a great position for being relaxed and open, making it easier for you to still your mind. You will need a soft flat surface to lie on. If a yoga mat feels too thin, fold a blanket or duvet underneath you. You can also use pillows for support in the different positions. See which of the reclining postures below is most comfortable for you.

Lying on your back

- Lie on a comfortable surface and, if you can, without a pillow under your head.
- **Savasana (corpse pose):** this is a traditional yoga relaxation posture. Lie on your back with your arms by your sides, palms facing up and your feet spread slightly apart from each other. Feel the floor taking your full weight. **See Figure S4.1**
- A pillow under your knees can also be helpful, especially if you have a bad back.

Lying on your side

- When lying on your side use pillows as support under your head and between your knees.

Lying on your belly

- Lie face down with your head tilted to one side and a soft pillow under your ear if needed. Your palms can be under your body or face down on the floor. This can be a helpful position if you feel very stressed or anxious; imagine all your emotions draining out of your chest and body into the earth. **See Figure S4.2**