



Mindfulness of Posture – Awareness in stillness and motion

Recognising the shape of our experience

Knowing how we are

“Mindfulness doesn’t depend on the posture. It depends on how you are relating to your experience.” - Sayadaw U Tejaniya

Having established ‘Mindfulness of Breathing’ – the first lens of ‘Mindfulness of the Body’ – we continue exploring the ‘First Anchor of Mindfulness’, by turning our attention to **Mindfulness of Posture**. This practice is the second lens that connects us with our bodies and involves simply knowing, clearly and directly, the position of our bodies as we move through life.

Gotama (the Buddha), highlighted the significance of this embodied awareness with profound simplicity, he said:

‘... there is no making an end of suffering without reaching the end of the world. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception and conceiving mind, that I declare that there is the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the world.’

Gotama is pointing to the reality that our entire experience of the world, including our pain, difficulties and disappointments, and the path to their end, happens *through* our body-mind process. Therefore, paying attention to the body – including its posture – is not a trivial matter; it’s about engaging directly with the world as we actually experience it. It’s about understanding the immediate *terrain* we inhabit.

Body Scan: An important new tool

The Body Scan as used in Mindfulness-Based therapies, is a simple yet powerful mindfulness practice that gently invites us to reconnect with our physical experience of being alive. It involves slowly and attentively moving our awareness through different parts of our body, often from our toes to the top of our heads, with a spirit of curiosity and kindness. As we scan, we simply notice any sensations present – like warmth, tingling, tension, or contact – without judgment or needing to change anything. For those of us new to recovery from our destructive cravings and compulsions, and perhaps unfamiliar with Buddhist practices, the body scan offers an accessible way for us to start rebuilding a safe and friendly connection with our physical self, an experience often disrupted by our addictions and compulsions.

This practice can be particularly supportive as addictive patterns are frequently driven by a desire to escape discomfort or *numb out*. Instead of avoiding sensations, the Body Scan helps us to build tolerance and curiosity, allowing us to feel more safely present with what's happening in our bodies, including our urges and emotions, just as they are. Rooted in ancient Buddhist traditions (such as Vipassana) that emphasise beginning with the body just as it is, it can help us to recognise areas of tension, manage stress, and observe our cravings as temporary experiences rather than urges that must be acted upon. Ultimately, the Body Scan fosters not only deep relaxation and emotional balance but also nurtures self-compassion and a greater sense of being grounded, which are invaluable supports on our journey to recovery and well-being.

How to do a body scan

- Begin by sitting or lying down comfortably. Allow your eyes to gently close if you wish.
- Take a slow, deep breath in... and a long breath out.
- Now, bring your attention to the top of your head. Notice any sensations — warmth, tingling, or stillness.
- Move your awareness down to your face: soften your eyes, your jaw, your cheeks.
- Bring your focus to your neck and shoulders. If you notice tension, gently invite a sense of release.

- Scan down through your arms — from the shoulders to the elbows, wrists, and all the way to your fingertips. Simply notice how they feel.
- Now draw your attention to your chest and upper back. Feel the rise and fall of your breath.
- Let your awareness move through your abdomen, then your lower back. Notice any areas of holding or ease.
- Bring your attention to your hips, then slowly scan down through your legs — thighs, knees, calves — all the way to your feet and toes.
- Pause here. Feel the weight of your body supported by the earth.
- Take one more slow, deep breath in... and gently exhale.
- When you're ready, open your eyes and return to the space around you.

Examples of how to do a body scan can be found on the internet, for instance, Dr Mark Williams, an Oxford Professor, from his book [Mindfulness](#) and video [Guided Body Scan Meditation](#) (39 minutes) and Professor Willem Kuyken also provides instruction in his book [Mindfulness for Life](#), and video [The Body Scan Practice](#) (36 minutes).

Mindfulness of Posture

The Mindfulness of Posture practice takes the modern Body Scan into our everyday life. While the Body Scan is a specific, often guided, practice usually done lying down, Mindfulness of Posture is a more continuous awareness applied in all positions throughout the day.

Mindfulness of Posture itself is straightforward. In Gotama's famous talk on the Four Anchors of Mindfulness, the instruction is clear:

“When walking, a practitioner knows, ‘I am walking.’ When standing, they know, ‘I am standing.’ When sitting, they know, ‘I am sitting.’ When lying down, they know, ‘I am lying down.’”

Or whatever posture the body is in, one simply knows, ‘My body is in this posture.’ This isn't about judging the posture as good or bad, nor necessarily about correcting it immediately (though awareness might naturally lead to some adjustments). It's primarily about cultivating a non-judgmental awareness of *how we are* physically in this moment.

Why is this important for our RAFT to Freedom?

- ★ **Grounding:** Like the breath, awareness of posture anchors us firmly in the present reality, counteracting our mind's tendency to get lost in past regrets or future worries – common triggers for our destructive compulsive behaviours and compulsions.
- ★ **Mind-Body connection:** It helps us to rebuild the vital connection between our mind and body, a connection often frayed or severed by the ways we get stuck trying to feel better and the attempt to numb uncomfortable feelings.
- ★ **Revealing habits:** It brings our unconscious postural habits into our awareness – how we slump when feeling down, tense up when stressed, or hold our body rigidly. Recognising these patterns is key to changing them.
- ★ **Observing impermanence:** We notice that our postures constantly change, reinforcing the understanding that everything changes and is impermanent.
- ★ **Insight into mental states:** Our posture often reflects our inner state. Awareness of posture can become awareness of our underlying moods and inner tensions.

In terms of our RAFT metaphor, if the ‘Five Gifts’ are the foundational planks, and the ‘Four Appropriate Response’s (the Four Brahma Viharas) are the rope binding them, then *awareness of posture* helps us to understand the *current condition and trim* of our vessel. Are we balanced and upright, ready to navigate? Or are we slumped and listing, taking on water? Knowing our posture helps us to recognise our present state and make necessary adjustments for our journey ahead. It's another essential tool – *the skill of embodied awareness* – that we gather for our raft.

Self-Reflections

Take a moment right now to bring awareness to your posture:

- ★ Are you sitting, standing, lying down, or walking? Can you simply note this?

- ★ Without judgment, what do you notice about how your body is positioned? Are there areas of tension? Ease? Slouching? Uprightness?
- ★ How aware are you, typically, of your posture as you go about your day (e.g., working, eating, watching TV, talking to others)?
- ★ Can you recall times when you noticed a link between your posture and your mood or energy level?
- ★ What habitual postures do you tend to adopt when feeling stressed, tired, sad, or anxious?
- ★ Have you noticed that if you change your posture, this can change your mood?
- ★ When you wake in the middle of the night, if an uncomfortable thought arises, do you physically turn over in an attempt to get away from it?

Journaling Prompts

Explore your relationship with posture further in your journal:

- ★ **Posture check-ins:** For one day, set gentle reminders (e.g., every hour) to simply check in and note your body's posture without judgment. At the end of the day, write about any patterns or insights you noticed.
- ★ **Mindful adjustment:** When you notice yourself in a posture associated with discomfort or a negative mood (for example,, slumped shoulders), gently experiment with adjusting to a more upright, open, yet relaxed posture. Hold it for a minute or two. Journal about any shifts (or lack thereof) you perceive in your physical sensations or mental state. Remember this practice is non-judgemental self-inquiry, not self-criticism.
- ★ **Posture during activities:** Pay specific attention to your posture during a routine activity (for example, eating a meal, brushing your teeth, working at a computer). Describe your typical posture and any sensations associated with it.
- ★ **Body scan connection:** If you practice or learn the Body Scan meditation (a systematic sweeping of awareness through the body), reflect on how this practice increases your general awareness of posture and physical sensations throughout the day.

Supporting material: scientific and philosophical perspectives on posture

For those interested in the science and philosophy behind this practice, here is a brief overview:

The simple act of noticing our posture connects with deep insights from various fields:

- ★ **Neuroscience:** Our sense of body position relies on proprioception – signals from muscles and joints processed by the brain. Conscious awareness of posture engages higher cortical areas (like the prefrontal cortex) involved in attention and self-awareness. Research on embodied cognition shows a two-way street: our mental state affects our posture, and our posture can influence our mood and thoughts (for example, studies linking slumped posture to increased negative thoughts or decreased energy – although some findings like 'power posing' are debated, the general principle holds). Awareness of posture is integral to interoception (sensing the body's internal state), which is vital for emotional regulation.
- ★ **Psychology:** Addiction often leads to dissociation or disconnection from the body as a way to avoid discomfort. Mindfulness of posture directly counters this by inviting presence *in* the body. It helps identify physical manifestations of stress (muscle tension, shallow breathing often linked to posture), which can be triggers for relapse. Techniques like the Body Scan systematically cultivate this awareness. Recognising how posture reflects emotions (e.g., shoulders slumped in sadness, chest tight in anxiety) allows for earlier intervention and healthier coping. Body language research also confirms posture as a key non-verbal communicator, both reflecting and influencing inner states.
- ★ **Philosophy:** Phenomenology (like the work of Merleau-Ponty) emphasises the 'lived body' as the centre of our experience and perception of the world; posture is fundamental to this lived experience. The mind-body connection, long debated in philosophy, is experientially explored through posture awareness – seeing how mental states manifest physically. Stoicism often included attention to physical posture, as reflecting inner composure and virtue.

These fields converge on the understanding that awareness of our physical posture is far more than superficial; it's deeply intertwined with our emotional state, cognitive processes, and overall sense of presence and well-being.

Mindfulness of Posture in our journey to wholeness.

Bringing awareness to posture is particularly potent in our recovery from harmful cravings and compulsions:

1. **Grounding in the present moment:** Posture is always happening *now*. Focusing on it pulls us out of ruminating about the past or worrying about the future, anchoring us in the only time we can make skilful choices. This disrupts the impulsive reactivity that often drives our destructive cravings and compulsions.
2. **Rebuilding the mind-body connection:** Enslavement to destructive cravings, compulsions and addictions numbs this vital link. Gently paying attention to our postures helps us to safely reinhabit our bodies. Learning to listen to the signals of stress, fatigue, or ease, without being overwhelmed, fosters trust in our embodied experience again. Practices like mindful walking, qigong, and yoga, explicitly integrate posture awareness.
3. **Regulating stress and cravings:** We can learn to notice the physical 'signatures' of stress or craving as they manifest in our posture (for example, a clenched jaw, tight shoulders or shallow breathing). Recognising these early allows us to intervene with mindful breathing or a conscious shift in our posture *before* the urge escalates, potentially interrupting the chain to us falling back into our old behaviours – falling overboard.
4. **Supporting emotional regulation and mood:** As psychology suggests, consciously adopting a more open, upright posture can gently influence our emotional state positively, countering feelings of shame or depression often associated with our harmful mental states and behaviours. This creates a positive feedback loop.
5. **Breaking habit loops:** Becoming aware of our habitual postures linked to our compulsive patterns (for example, curling up in withdrawal or the specific postures during substance use) allows us to consciously

interrupt these physical patterns, which can help weaken the associated mental habits.

6. **Rebuilding self-compassion:** Treating our bodies with mindful attention, by noticing its posture with kindness rather than judgment, is an act of self-care. It fosters respect and care for the body, not as an enemy or source of shame, but as our vehicle for healing and awareness, nurturing the self-compassion vital for our journey to liberation.

Remember to Remember

Mindfulness of Posture is a simple yet profound practice available in every moment. By cultivating awareness of how we hold and move our bodies, we anchor ourselves in the present, rebuild the vital mind-body connection, gain insight into our habits and emotional states, and develop a key skill for our emotional regulation and self-compassion.

This awareness is another crucial tool we gather for our raft in helping us to *Recognise* the immediate terrain of our embodied experience. As you move through your day, try weaving in moments of simply *knowing* how your body is positioned. This grounded awareness prepares us for the next layer of body mindfulness: bringing clear comprehension to our actions – the third lens of Mindfulness of Body.

Sutta references

- **Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10 / DN 22 - The Foundations of Mindfulness):**
This core text provides the direct instruction for mindfulness of posture.
 - *Summary:* Within the section on Mindfulness of the Body, Gotama instructs practitioners to be clearly aware of the body's current posture: "When walking, he knows, 'I am walking.' When standing, he knows, 'I am standing.' When sitting, he knows, 'I am sitting.' When lying down, he knows, 'I am lying down.' Or however his body is disposed, he knows it is just so."
- **Rohitassa Sutta (AN 4.45 or SN 2.26):** Contains the teaching that the world and the path to its cessation are found within this body.
 - *Summary:* A deva named Rohitassa asks the Gotama if it's possible to reach the end of the world by travelling. The Gotama

replies that one cannot reach the end of the world by physical travel, but that "just within this fathom-long body, with its perception and conceiving mind," he declares the world, its arising, its cessation, and the path thereto. This emphasizes the importance of investigating our immediate embodied experience.

- **Kāyagatāsati Sutta (MN 119 - Mindfulness Directed to the Body):**

Emphasises the overall benefits of body awareness.

- *Summary:* While focusing broadly on body mindfulness, this sutta reinforces the value of practices like posture awareness, explaining that cultivating mindfulness directed to the body leads to great benefit, including encompassing skilful qualities and progress towards liberation.

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