



Recognise - Mindfulness of body

10 - Mindfulness of Posture

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, Rohitassa Sutta (AN 4.45 / SN 2.26), translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu

Recognising the shape of our experience

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 is the second lens connecting us with our bodies, and it involves simply knowing, clearly and directly, the position of our bodies as we move through life.

Gotama (the Buddha) pointed to the reality that our entire experience of the world happens through our body-mind process. This includes our pain, difficulties and disappointments, and the path to their ending. Paying attention to the body, including its posture, is therefore not a trivial matter. It is engaging directly with the world as we actually experience it, with the immediate terrain we inhabit.

The body scan: an important tool

The body scan, as used in mindfulness-based approaches, is a simple yet powerful practice that invites us to reconnect with our physical experience of being alive. It involves slowly and attentively moving our awareness through different parts of the body, often from the top of the head to the tip of the toes, with a spirit of curiosity and kindness. As we scan, we simply notice any sensations present - warmth, tingling, tension, contact - without judgment or the need to change anything. For those of us newer to this kind of practice, and perhaps unfamiliar with Buddhist meditation, the body scan offers an accessible way to start rebuilding a safe, friendly connection with our physical self. This is a connection often disrupted by the pull of compulsive and reactive behaviours.

This practice can be particularly supportive, since these patterns are frequently driven by a desire to escape discomfort or numb out. Instead of avoiding sensation, the body scan helps us build tolerance and curiosity, allowing us to feel more safely

present with what is happening in the body, including our urges and emotions, just as they are. Rooted in ancient traditions that emphasise beginning with the body just as it is, it can help us recognise areas of tension, manage stress, and observe cravings as temporary experiences rather than urges that must be acted upon. The body scan fosters not only relaxation and emotional balance, but also self-compassion and a greater sense of being grounded.

How to do a body scan (skip this practice if you find it triggering)

- Begin by sitting or lying down comfortably. Allow your eyes to close gently if you wish.
- Take a slow, deep breath in, and a long breath out.
- Bring your attention to the top of your head. Notice any sensations - warmth, tingling or no discernable sensations at all.
- 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 - shoulders, elbows, wrists, all the way to your fingertips - simply noticing how they feel.
- Draw your attention to your chest and upper back. Feel the rise and fall of your breathing.
- Let your awareness move through your abdomen, then your lower back, noticing any areas of holding or ease.
- Bring your attention to your hips, then slowly scan down through your legs - thighs, knees, calves - to your feet and toes.
- Pause. Feel the weight of your body supported by the earth.
- Take one more slow 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, in his book [Mindfulness](#) and video [Guided Body Scan Meditation](#) (39 minutes). Professor Willem Kuyken also provides instruction in his book [Mindfulness for Life](#), and video [The Body Scan Practice](#) (36 minutes).

Mindfulness of posture

Mindfulness of posture takes this same quality of attention into everyday life. While the body scan is a specific, often a guided practice and usually done lying down, mindfulness of posture is a more continuous awareness applied in every position throughout the day. Gotama's instruction, from his talk on the four Anchors of

Mindfulness, is characteristically direct:

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 however the body is disposed, they know it just so.

This is not about judging the posture as good or bad, nor necessarily about correcting it immediately, though awareness may naturally lead to some adjustment. It is primarily about cultivating a non-judgmental awareness of how and where we are, physically, in this moment. Our posture can reflect how we are feeling - we may slump when we are tired or low, contract when we feel anxious or threatened, or naturally become more upright when we feel engaged and alert. But the relationship also appears to work in the other direction. We might also notice the transitions themselves - rising from a chair, beginning to walk, coming to a stop, or settling down to rest.

Research suggests that changing the way we hold ourselves can feed back into our emotional and physiological state. Gently adopting a more upright, less slumped posture may, for some of us, support greater alertness, energy or a shift in mood. This gives us something else to notice and explore: not an instruction to hold ourselves in a 'correct' way, but an opportunity to discover how body and mind continually influence one another.

Why this matters for our raft

- **Grounding:** like the breath, awareness of posture anchors us firmly in the present, counteracting our mind's tendency to get lost in past regret or future worry - common triggers for the pull of compulsive and reactive behaviours.
- **Mind-body connection:** it helps rebuild the connection between mind and body, a connection often frayed by patterns of escape and self-sabotage and the attempt to numb uncomfortable feelings. Practices such as mindful walking, qigong and yoga make this connection explicit, weaving posture awareness directly into movement.
- **Revealing habits:** it brings unconscious postural habits into our awareness - how we slump when feeling down, tense up when stressed, hold the body rigidly. Recognising these patterns is key to changing them.
- **Observing impermanence:** postures constantly change, reinforcing the understanding that everything changes and is impermanent.
- **Insight into mental states:** posture often reflects our inner state - we may notice ourselves slumping when low, tightening when anxious or becoming more upright when engaged. But this relationship can also work in the other direction: gently changing our posture may influence our mood, energy and level of alertness. Awareness of posture therefore gives us another way of recognising, and sometimes gently responding to, what is happening within

us - noticing the physical signature of stress or craving as it arises (a clenched jaw, tight shoulders, shallow breathing) can let us intervene, with a few mindful breaths or a conscious shift in posture, before an urge has the chance to fully take hold.

Noticing posture with kindness rather than judgment is itself an act of self-care - treating the body not as an enemy or a source of shame, but as the vehicle for this whole journey of healing and awareness.

In terms of our raft metaphor, if the [Five Gifts](#) are the foundational planks, and the four Appropriate Responses are the rope binding them, then awareness of posture helps us understand the current condition and trim of our vessel. Are we balanced and upright, ready to navigate, or slumped and listing, taking on water? Knowing our posture helps us recognise our present state and make the adjustments our journey needs. It is another essential tool - the skill of embodied awareness - that we gather for our raft.

Practice - a moment of posture (skip this practice if you find it triggering)

Wherever you are right now, pause and bring awareness to your posture:

- 1 Notice whether you are sitting, standing, lying down, or walking. Simply name it to yourself.
- 2 You might also notice the transitions themselves - rising from a chair, beginning to walk, coming to a stop, or settling down to rest.
- 3 Without judging it, notice how your body is positioned - its weight, points of contact and support, balance, tension or ease.
- 4 If it feels helpful, make one small adjustment - softening the shoulders, lengthening the spine - and notice what, if anything, shifts.
- 5 Notice first, then perhaps experiment gently, and notice again.
- 6 Let this be enough. The practice is the noticing, not the fixing.

Try weaving a few of these moments into an ordinary day - while waiting, working, or eating - and notice what you learn about the link between how you hold your body and how you feel.

Self-reflections

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

- 1 Am I sitting, standing, lying down, or walking? Can I simply note this? ([view card](#))

- 2 Without judgment, what do I notice about how my body is positioned? Tension? Ease? Slouching? Uprightness? ([view card](#))
 - 3 How aware am I, typically, of my posture as I go about my day - working, eating, watching TV, talking with others? ([view card](#))
 - 4 Can I recall times I noticed a link between my posture and my mood or energy level? ([view card](#))
 - 5 What habitual postures do I tend to adopt when feeling stressed, tired, sad or anxious? ([view card](#))
 - 6 Have I noticed that changing my posture can change my mood? ([view card](#))
 - 7 When I wake in the night and an uncomfortable thought arises, do I physically turn over in an attempt to get away from it? ([view card](#))
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Journaling prompts

Explore your relationship with posture further in your journal:

- 1 **Posture check-ins:** for one day, set gentle reminders - every hour, say - to check in and note your body's posture without judgment. At the end of the day, write about any patterns or insights you noticed.
 - 2 **Mindful adjustment:** when you notice yourself in a posture associated with discomfort or a low mood - slumped shoulders, for example - gently experiment with adjusting to a more upright, open, relaxed posture. Hold it for a minute or two. Journal about any shifts you perceive, physically or mentally. Remember, this is non-judgmental self-inquiry, not self-criticism.
 - 3 **Posture during activities:** pay specific attention to your posture during a routine activity - eating a meal, brushing your teeth, working at a computer. Describe your typical posture and any sensations associated with it.
 - 4 **Body scan connection:** if you practise the body scan meditation described in this chapter, reflect on how it increases your general awareness of posture and physical sensations throughout the day.
 - 5 **The vessel's trim:** using the chapter's own metaphor, write about what your posture right now might say about the "trim" of your vessel - balanced and upright, or listing and taking on water?
 - 6 **A postural habit worth changing:** name one habitual posture you'd like to soften or change. What's the smallest possible step towards noticing it more often?
 - 7 **Turning over in the night:** if the seventh self-reflection resonated, write about what it might look like to meet a middle-of-the-night thought with stillness rather than movement, just once.
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Supporting material: scientific and philosophical perspectives on posture

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

- **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, such as the prefrontal cortex, involved in attention and self-awareness. Research on embodied cognition suggests a two-way relationship: our mood can influence how we hold and move the body, while changing posture - for example, becoming more upright rather than slumped - may in turn influence mood, energy and alertness. These effects appear to be modest and context-dependent, rather than supporting stronger claims sometimes made for 'power posing'. Proprioception contributes to our wider sense of body awareness alongside interoception - our awareness of the body's internal physiological state - both of which can contribute to emotional regulation.
- **Psychology & Psychotherapy:** disconnection from the body is a common feature where compulsive patterns are present, often as a way of avoiding discomfort. Mindfulness of Posture directly counters this by inviting presence in the body, helping identify physical manifestations of stress - muscle tension, shallow breathing - that can precede a return to old patterns. Recognising how posture reflects emotion (shoulders slumped in sadness, chest tight in anxiety, for example) allows for earlier, gentler intervention. Body-language research also confirms posture as a significant non-verbal communicator, both reflecting and influencing inner states.
- **Philosophy:** phenomenology, in the work of thinkers such as 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 explored experientially through posture awareness - seeing directly how mental states manifest physically. Stoicism, too, often attended to physical posture as an expression of inner composure.

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

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 and rebuild the vital mind-body connection. We also gain insight into our habits and emotional states, and develop a key skill for emotional regulation

and self-compassion.

We can also gently explore the two-way relationship between posture and how we feel: notice first, perhaps make a small adjustment, and then notice again. Our mood can shape how we hold ourselves, while becoming a little more upright, open or relaxed may sometimes shift our energy, alertness or mood in return. This awareness is another crucial tool we gather for our raft, helping us 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 - a small, steady practice that prepares the ground for everything that follows.

No matter what posture you are in, if your mind is aware with understanding, you are meditating.

— Sayadaw U Tejaniya, *Don't Look Down On The Defilements, They Will Laugh At You* (2008)

This awareness of posture prepares us for the next layer of body mindfulness: bringing Clear Comprehension to our actions.

See the [Index of sutta references](#) (web, D8. The print books carry a consolidated sutta appendix instead.)

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