

Introduction to Meditation Mindfulness of the Body Homework

Mindfulness of breathing is a wonderful way to begin cultivating awareness. As mindfulness develops, we bring this awareness to other areas of our lives. During this week we expand the practice to include the body.

The busier a person's life, the easier it is to discount the importance of staying in touch with how the body feels. Many people may be attentive to their body, but it is from the outside in; that is, they are concerned about body image and appearance. Mindfulness of the body is attention from the inside out. We notice what the body is feeling, its sensations. We give a generous amount of time to be with the felt sense of the body. In this way, the body can serve as a safeguard from getting caught up in distraction and mental preoccupations.

Benefits of Mindfulness of the Body

First, cultivating mindfulness of the body increases our familiarity with our bodies. We learn how the body responds to our inner and outer lives, to our thoughts and emotions, and to events around us. When we suppress or ignore aspects of our emotional, cognitive, and volitional lives, we also tend to disconnect from the physical manifestations of our experience. Conversely, when we distance ourselves from our physical experience, we lose touch with the inner life of our emotions and thoughts. Awakenning the body from within can help us to discover, not only our repressed emotions, but also a greater capacity to respond to the world with healthy emotions and motivations.

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Second, in cultivating mindfulness we are developing non-reactivity. This is the ability to be present with experience without turning away, habitually seeking or resisting change, or clinging to pleasant and avoiding unpleasant experience. Our reflexive desires, aversions, preferences, and judgments often interfere with our ability to know what is actually happening. Being non-reactively present with physical experience gives us more freedom to choose our response to life.

Last, but not least, mindfulness of physical sensations helps us both to relax tension and to understand its causes.

Mindfulness Exercises Week 2

1. Continue your daily twenty-minute meditation session.
2. In the midst of your regular activities, devote two one-hour periods during the week to being mindful of your body. During this time, about every five minutes, check in with your body. Notice, in particular, your shoulders, stomach, face, and hands. If you find tension in any of these places, relax. You can use the Insight Timer to set up a 60 minute session with 5 minute interval bells.
3. Devote one meal to eating slowly and mindfully, paying attention to the tastes, textures, temperature, and other qualities of your food, and to the experience of your body eating. When does your body tell you that have had enough? If possible, take the meal in silence, with no other activities to distract you. You might want to put down your spoon or fork between bites. Whenever your mind

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wanders, or whenever you get caught up in reactions to what is happening, relax and come back to the simplicity of eating mindfully.

4. Start noticing when, how and by what, your attention becomes distracted or fragmented. Are there any common themes or patterns in the kinds of thoughts, feelings, activities, or pre-occupations where your mindfulness disappears? If you discover any, discuss what you find with somebody: a friend, relative, or colleague.