

Mindfulness: Movement

Being mindful can apply to the way our bodies move and feel. In between movement, the body gains benefits by focusing on the pauses or rest.

The connections between our mind, body, and external reality are a learned practice where human beings can regulate extremely subtle psychological and physiological processes. We can control our circulatory system and our nervous system, our moods and our thoughts. We can perceive what's going on in our minds and bodies and what's going on around us.

Breath is the link between mind and body. Breathing is one of the very few physiological processes that functions both voluntarily and involuntarily. In other words, we can consciously control it when we want to and it happens automatically when we do not.

- All of our emotional shifts are reflected in our breathing pattern. When we get excited, we breathe faster. When we get depressed, we sigh. When we are calm, our breathing is deep and regular.

However, just as shifts in our state of mind change our breathing pattern, consciously changing our breathing method can shift our state of mind.

- In other words, through correct breathing technique we can learn to regulate our mind. When our mind is calm and clear, we see things more objectively, make decisions more wisely, and work more diligently.

Abdominal Breathing

1. Sit in a stable chair. Do not lean back, sit up straight.
2. Have your feet shoulder width apart, flat on the floor, and parallel to one another.
3. Let your hands rest naturally. Tuck in your chin slightly.
4. Lightly press the tip of the tongue against the roof of your mouth just behind your upper row of teeth.
5. Keep your eyes open and look straight ahead, but do not stare at any object or pattern in the floor. Just keep your eyes soft and relaxed.
6. Very slowly inhale through your nose and gently push out your lower belly as if it is filling up with the air that you are inhaling. When your belly feels about 80% full, pause for about 3 seconds.
7. Then, even more slowly exhale through your nose and gently pull in your lower belly as if you are now squeezing out the air.
8. Inhalation should be roughly 3 seconds, the pause 3 seconds, and the longer exhalation about 4 seconds. Try 5 cycles of abdominal breathing

Breath Counting Meditation

1. Assume the same physical posture as in Preparation Breathing.
2. Engage abdominal breathing and inhale. Pause.
3. Exhale and at the very end of your out-breath, mentally count, "One."
4. Again, inhale, pause, exhale, and then at the end of your out-breath mentally count, "Two."
5. Keep counting like this at the end of every exhalation until you reach "Ten."
6. Then, starting counting backward --- nine, eight, seven, six, etc. -- until you reach "one".
7. If, because of random thoughts, you even briefly forget which number you are on or hesitate, then you must start over again at "one."
8. See if you can go all the way up to ten and back down to one again without making any mistakes.

WHY: Breath Counting Meditation is a strength-building exercise for the mind. It cleanses away distracting thoughts and builds concentration power. You will know that you are building mental strength because it will become easier and easier to reach 10 and go back down to 1 again. When you can do this with ease, increase the count to 20. When that becomes easy, increase to 30. And so on.

What is Mindful Movement?

Mindful movement means slowing down. Being present in what we are doing at any one time. By practicing mindful movement we can slow down to hear or discover what we are thinking and feeling. We can then allow that pause to help us decide what to do with the feelings or thoughts.

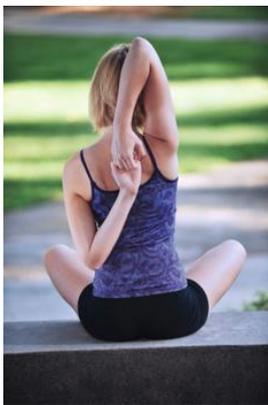
WHY:

- Increases gray matter and the size of the memory centers in the brain
- Increases overall brain wave activity and improves cognition
- Improves mood, relieves depression and anxiety, and improves stress response
- Enhances focus and memory and improves learning and academic performance

Headaches

Headaches caused by tension and stress. Poses can stretch the tight muscles in the upper body, releasing endorphins (feel good hormone) and relaxes the mind. It helps release tension by increasing blood flow to the muscles, making the nervous system less agitated and reducing a chance for a headache. Poses that put weight or pressure on the head and neck should be avoided. You do not want to dramatically increase blood flow to the head.

- Seated Forward Bends- seated forward bends release tension in the hamstrings and lower back and help prevent headaches caused by tension on the legs and lower back
- **Seated twists**- help prevent headaches that originate by tension in the upper and lower back.
- **Eagle arms**- stretch the upper back, back of the shoulders- releases tension in the muscles of the upper back.
- **Cow Face** (strap)- stretch the triceps, front shoulder heads and rotator cuffs- releases tension from the arms and shoulders



Reduce Anxiety

Tight neck muscles can lead to anxiety. Gentle stretches and strengthening can open up tight muscles in the body, increasing neck flexibility and rebalancing postural muscles. Simple slow movements will lubricate the neck and increase range of motion

- **Seated neck stretches-**

- Seated twists- muscles in neck connected to upper back- twists increase range of motion
- Hands and knees/**seated/standing- cat/cow-** rounding the back and then mild backbend can help strengthen the neck muscles and stretch the front of the neck.



- **Lotus or Easy Seated-** This pose calms the mind and washes away fatigue and muscular tension. When you relax and unwind, your brain is able to rejuvenate itself and be more alert to take on new challenges.

- **Eagle Pose -** beneficial for quieting the mind and bringing the attention to the body.



- **Legs Up The Wall Pose** - a simple but effective anxiety-busting posture that calms the chatter in our minds.



- **Fish Pose** - can be used for fatigue and anxiety relief, as well as gentle back and shoulder stretching. Beginners may want to place a thickly-folded blanket beneath the head for neck support if they are experiencing any discomfort.



Calm

These movements can help take you out of your sympathetic nervous system and into your parasympathetic response (rest and digest) instead. Your sympathetic nervous system is half of your autonomic nervous system (ANS). It is what triggers what is commonly referred to as the fight or flight response whenever you are under stress. The parasympathetic nervous system is the other half of the autonomic nervous system (ANS). It promotes relaxation and healthy digestion. Mindful movement has been shown to be effective in controlling fight or flight response.

Mindful movement also increases your body's production of two hormones essential to cultivating happiness, health, and feelings of calmness. Oxytocin, aka "the cuddle hormone," can make you feel closer to your loved ones, decrease your stress, and improve your overall wellness. Endorphins play an important role in managing physical pain and negative emotions.

- **Mountain-** This simple standing pose can help you focus your mind on your breathing, thereby relaxing you. It can also alleviate headaches and insomnia. When you don't get enough sleep, your brain isn't able to function at its best. This pose should help you sleep better so your brain is more alert.
 - Stand with your feet together, arms by the sides, your fingers pointing down to the ground. Keep your abdomen engaged but your pelvis neutral.
 - Broaden your collarbone and roll your shoulders back.
 - Keep your chin parallel to the ground, the top of your head spiraling up to the ceiling as you feel your spine lengthen.

- **Standing/seated Forward Bend** - forward bends are excellent for calming our nervous system, providing a release of the upper body and soothes the mind through gentle inversion. Helps nourish the brain by improving blood flow to the hypothalamus and pineal glands in your brain. This, in turn, boosts brain function and cognitive function

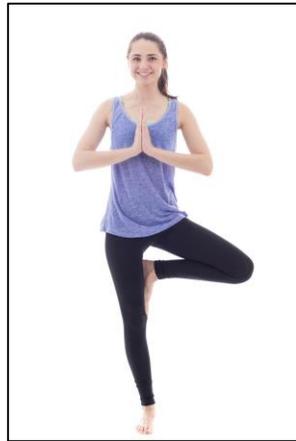


- **Balancing Poses** - quiet the mind and cultivate focused awareness. When you're in a balancing pose, you must be giving it your full attention to come into your fullest variation. Living in the moment and focusing on the effort of the pose helps you become stronger and more stable.

- Half Moon Pose



- Tree



- Airplane



Energize/Tired/Lethargic

It sounds too good to be true. But when you're feeling low energy, sometimes all you need to do is give yourself a few extra slow, deep breaths. Focusing on the inhale can give you extra energy because it's a great way to get extra oxygen to your brain. It's like a yawn, but way more effective.

Try this:

1. Close your eyes and take a few regular breaths just to check in and see what your breathing pattern currently is. Then, **breathe** slowly through the nostrils. Make your inhale as slow and smooth as you possibly can. Exhale fully. Repeat at least 5 times.
2. Sometimes just a little **movement** can get your blood pumping and give you the energy you need.
 - Start standing tall. Inhaling your arms up over head. Exhale as you fold forward, bringing your fingertips to the floor or a block. Inhale as you reach your chest forward, collarbones wide. Exhale, keep your spine long as you fold in again. Inhale, and stand up the same way you bent down. Go slow and keep the rhythm of the breath steady.

- **Camel:** Backbends are fabulous energy boosters. They naturally speed up the heart rate and the breath and are a naturally stimulating to the body's systems. Try this: Kneel on your mat with your hips stacked directly over your knees. Bring your hands to your sacrum and hug your elbows toward each other behind you so your collar bones are wide. With an inhale, lift your chest upward. With an exhale, soften. Stay here for a couple breaths, then lift yourself back up with an inhale. Then, sit on your heels to rest. Repeat 2-3 more times – *can be done kneeling, standing or in a chair.*



- **Downward Facing Dog-** Inversions are said to bring fresh, oxygenated blood to your brain, which can refresh the brain and result in clearer thinking and more energy. Downward Dog is also a great stretch for your back, legs, arms, it's kind of a catch-all pose that's good for everything- can be done on floor or against a wall or with a chair.



- **Childs Pose** - stimulates your nervous system and helps reenergize your body. *Can be done on floor or a desk/table.*



- **Warrior II** – awakens and energizes the body and empowers strength. Any warrior pose allows the mind to take a break from what is happening around you. It allows you to focus on your strength and steadiness.



- **Chair Pose** – awakens and energizes the body and empowers strength.



- **Upright Cat & Cow** – a seated version of the classic cat/cow move is designed to move energy through the spine, by activating through rocking the spine back and forth without putting pressure on it.



Sleep

Yoga reduces stress by lowering cortisol levels in the brain (ie. "the stress hormone") which helps reduce stress.

Yoga regulates the nervous system. If your 'fight or flight' response was prompted by something that happened to you earlier in the day then your nervous system is still elevated. Activating your parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest) is going to help you get to sleep and stay asleep.

Yoga helps you handle uncertainty. One of the most frustrating things about not being able to sleep is stressing out about all the things you have to do the next day. By focusing on the movement and allowing the muscles to release, your mind can follow.

- Easy Forward Bend – creates an overall sense of ease in the body while opening the hips. Touted to be really good for your brain, this type of forward bend helps revive your nervous system, boost blood supply, and calm your mind.



- Plow Pose – turning the blood flow around can bring the body a calming sense of vitality, great for sleep.



- Spinal Twists – gentle twists relieve tension through the spine to rinse out tension from the day.

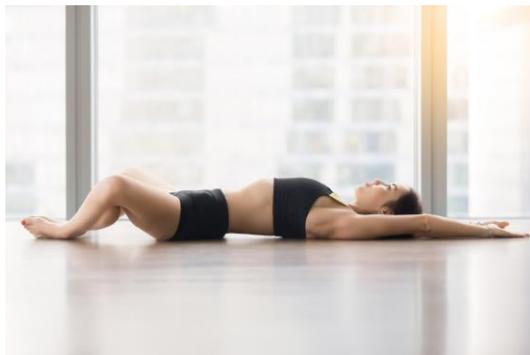
- Supine Spinal Twist



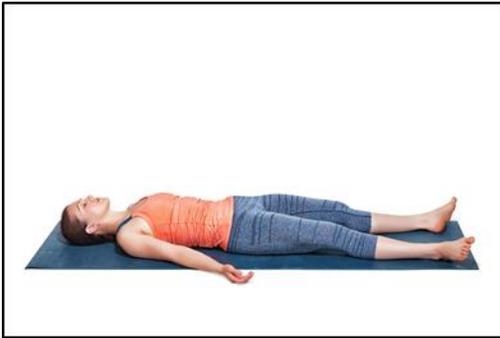
- Seated Spinal Twist



- **Reclined Butterfly** – helps the body get ready to rest and observe the breath. It can be helpful to place one hand on the heart and one hand on the belly to feel the rise and fall of each inhale and exhale.



- **Corpse Pose** – gets the body into a relaxed state to focus the attention on the breath and calming.



Head-to-Toe Relaxation

After you tense and release every part of your body, you'll feel lighter and less stressed.

1. Get into a comfortable position. You can sit or lie down.
2. Close your eyes, if you feel comfortable doing so. At first you'll need to keep your eyes open to read the instructions, of course, but once you get the hang of it you'll just remember what to do.
3. Focus on relaxing your entire body as much as possible.
4. Start by tensing your toes; curl them up into your feet and hold them tight for 3-5 seconds. Release them. Take a deep breath and repeat for another 3-5 seconds.
5. Next, tighten all your muscles from your feet up to your waist. Do a quick mental scan and make sure you have them all: your calves, your thighs, your bottom. Hold for 3-5 seconds, release and repeat.
6. Now do the same thing with your stomach. Tighten it as much as you can. Hold it. Then release and repeat.
7. Then do the same thing with your chest. Tighten, hold, release. Do this twice.
8. Now your whole torso, including your shoulders, which will probably lift slightly off the ground or away from your chair when you tense them.
9. Now move to your hands. Tighten them into fists, hold for a count of five and release. Repeat this two times.
10. Then tighten your entire arms, bending your fists back at the wrist. Hold for five seconds and release. Then repeat.
11. Tighten your neck by turning your head as far to the right as you can without feeling any discomfort and holding it for 3-5 seconds, then release. Repeat this one more time.
12. Do the same thing on the left.
13. Now scrunch and tighten your whole face and hold it for five seconds. Do this one more time and then you are done.

Now that you've tensed and released every part of your body, do a quick scan. How do you feel? Are there places you'd like to tense and release again for a little more relaxation? Go ahead and do that.

When you are ready, open your eyes and begin to slowly move around. Enjoy the calm feeling this activity is sure to bring!

Improve Athletic Performance

- Seated pigeon - improves mobility. *Can be done on back or in chair with Figure 4.*



- Cobra – releases pressure in the spine.



- Dolphin - stretches the upper back and shoulders, hamstrings, calves and foot arches at the same time.



- Frog - improves strength of connective tissue around the ankles and knees, which makes it a great warm-up movement prior to lower-body exercises.



- Supported Backbends - they very lightly stretch tight spots, while giving athletes a chance for deep relaxation, which speeds up recovery.
 - Fish



- Bridge--The bridge pose is a restorative pose that calms your mind and also revitalizes you. It boosts blood supply to the brain and revitalizes your nervous system. Regular practice can even reduce your migraine headaches.



- Reclined Big Toe - strengthens the knees and can target the IT band (a common tight spot in runners) and can relieve backaches and sciatic pain. Using a band/strap makes it accessible for everyone.



- Boat Pose – increases abdominal and hip flexor strength.



- Bow Pose – stretches the front of the body, improves posture and strengthens the back muscles.



Humming Bee Breathing

The humming bee breathing can improve your memory as well as concentration. It can help release any negative emotions from your mind and calm you down as well. Perform this pose every day to experience the calmness associated with the humming sound vibrations. You can also use this as an antidote to stress or fatigue.

- Find a quiet, airy spot and sit down with your eyes closed. Smile gently.
- Notice the sensations your body experiences within and the quietness around you.
- Now put your index fingers onto your ears in the cartilage between the ear and cheek.
- Inhale deeply. As you exhale, press gently down onto the cartilage.
- Keeping it pressed, make a loud bee-like humming sound. Higher pitched sounds work better, but if you are more comfortable with a low pitch that's fine too.
- Inhale again and repeat this 3–4 times.

Facial Massage

Facial Massage is designed to unclog cavities of your skull and free up mucus, dust, and other pollutants. This helps improve blood circulation and oxygen flow and has a positive impact on mental health. It also relieves stress, calms the nervous system, and boosts focus as well as brain power.

- Put your thumbs on your temples. Use the other 4 fingers of each hand to gently massage your forehead.
- Next, use the middle and forefinger to massage around the eyes using a circular motion.
- Next, use your thumb and index finger to pinch your eyebrows, following their natural curve so you can feel the bone beneath.
- Now massage your cheeks upward along the cheekbones.
- After this, massage the gap between the lips and nose and lips and chin. Use your fingers in a left-to-right motion.
- Massage the sides of your face and also the area behind the ears using a back and forth motion.
- Look up and now massage your neck using firm upward strokes



Practice: Put a sequence together of several poses that you would use in a given situation. One that incorporates settling the mind through breath, movement and relaxation can do in 2-3 min.

SITUATION	Overstimulated/overwhelmed	Lethargic/Sleepy	Choice:
BREATH			
MOVEMENT			
RELAXATION/MEDITATION			

Closing Thoughts:

You can also incorporate mini-bits of yoga into your daily life to help you manage stressful moments. Here are some ideas:

- **Before a test.** Do easy neck and shoulder rolls right at your desk to relieve tense muscles in your neck, shoulders, and back. Also try squeezing and relaxing your fingers and hands.
- **While studying.** Try a few simple yoga moves to help relax any areas that may have become tense while studying. Neck and shoulder rolls can release tension in your back and shoulders. Forward folds and twists will relieve lower back strain. Give your face a mini-massage to help loosen up a tense jaw. Balancing poses, like tree pose, can help focus your energy .
- **Before bed.** Do a few yoga stretches before bed to help you relax — especially if you have a lot on your mind. Poses where you fold forward, like child's pose, tend to be calming. They allow you to tune out the rest of the world and feel quiet and peaceful. Stay in a forward fold for 3 or 4 full, slowing breaths, and allow your body and mind to relax.

- Incorporate a lot of backbends to remind teens of the joy of childhood and to counteract all the hunching over desks and books.
- Since teens are more likely to be self-conscious than other age groups, it's important to give a lot of positive reinforcement and encouragement—which might mean making fewer adjustments or giving less verbal instruction.
- Bringing teens into challenging poses helps focus them and can also be a tactic to keep behavioral problems at bay. When the class is working on a challenging pose or sequence, they have to concentrate, so it's more difficult for them to talk or distract others.