



A Whole Body Wellness Series Presentation

Whole Body Relaxation

Tune into your body's messages...and feel
EMPOWERED!

Whole Body Relaxation

How To Connect Your Mind & Body

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How To Connect Your Mind & Body

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1. Body as Messenger

The Whole Body Relaxation practice is a highly valuable tool for strengthening your mind-body connection and improving your well-being. It serves as a bridge between mind and body allowing you to tap into this amazing relationship. The most compelling outcome of scientific study thus far is the fact that the mind and body are in constant communication with each other. They exist within a complex reciprocal relationship whereby what occurs in your mind occurs in your body and vice versa. This powerful relationship is further substantiated through our understanding of stress. It is an awareness of the stress response and the physiological mechanisms of mediation associated with it that allows us to see the quintessential intertwining of mind and body. Given their evident association we will refer to this relationship with one word, bodymind.

Most people are either unaware of or ignore their body's messages - unless of course they feel significant indications of pain or pleasure. Consulting the body to help make a decision, deal with an issue or gain important insight is often not even a consideration. This is generally saved for the land of rational thinking. In any moment you can 'tune into' and listen to sensations in your body as a resource for guidance and improving your well-being. Imagine that your mind and body communicate on radio frequencies. Your ability to hear or tune into these frequencies reflects the clarity and strength of your signal. Listening to the vital information from your bodymind often leads to deeper self-awareness and subtle indications of how to achieve greater well-being. Practicing the Whole Body Relaxation Meditation allows you to tune into the frequency of communication between your bodymind with greater clarity. The following are examples of physical sensations or messages you might notice when practicing the Whole Body Relaxation Meditation;

Warmth, cold, heavy, light, tingly, pressure, tightness, vibrating and, smooth. Here are some examples of how you might decode your body's messages: An ache in your chest or butterflies in your stomach may indicate that you have unfinished business in a relationship, pressure on your temples may be a signal that you don't feel comfortable making a certain decision, while tight shoulders may be indicating that you are weighed down with too many responsibilities.

At first listening to and decoding the body's messages may seem challenging. The messages can be very subtle and you may doubt or question what you are feeling.

Do your best to clear away any judgments, maintain an air of open curiosity and then trust what comes to your mind. The body offers very insightful, accurate and practical guidance when we get out of the way and just listen to it. As you practice this meditation you reinforce the clarity of the messages and release any static that inhibits you from listening. Regular practice further allows you to witness patterns in your body's messages and their relationship to aspects of your health and your life.

Your bodymind listening skills directly influence how well you are able to use this wisdom to create greater health and vitality. For example, many people are aware that a tension headache frequently starts with stress yet they only notice the headache once it is in physical form. Perceived stress leads to subtle signs of tension in the body which can over time cause a headache. Wouldn't it be nice to notice (hear) the messages being sent to adjust your posture, mood, or circumstances before getting a headache? You have this ability. It only requires that you develop your bodymind listening skills.

Your bodymind connection represents your ability to sense what feels authentic and balanced. It makes sense that the more you focus on listening to the subtle (and not so subtle) messages, the more you foster bodymind alignment and overall well-being. At times the messages you hear such as tension or discomfort may lead you to take action to release or heal the issue. At other times the messages may serve as reminders or lead you to become aware of patterns you may want to strengthen or transform. Still other times the messages may not seem to make sense in the moment but may lead over time to understanding an area of your life. The important thing to remember is not to judge but to listen.

2. Maintain an Open Mind

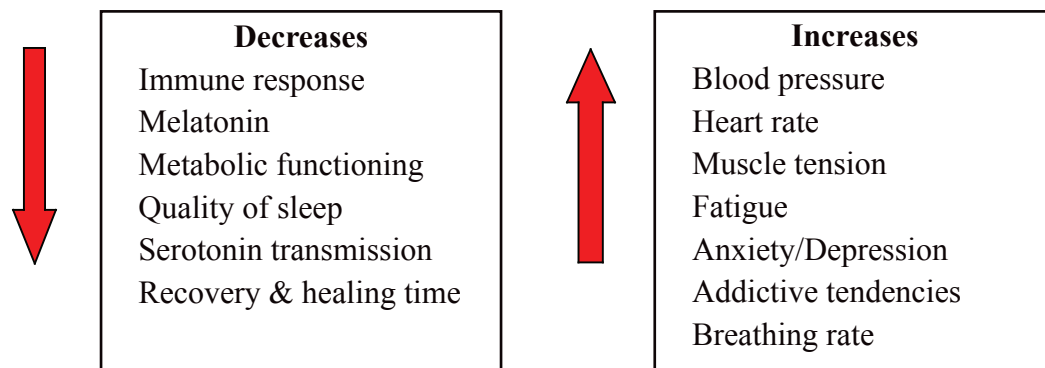
An important objective of the Whole Body Relaxation Meditation is to meet your body with compassion. Do your best not to analyze or evaluate the sensations you are noticing but simply tune in, notice and observe them. We recommend holding an air of curiosity and stance of compassionate acceptance. Through your presence and open mind you may notice the sensations shift. As best as possible allow the shifts to occur while being present and observing them. We will also introduce focused breathing as a tool to release any area of tension or discomfort.

During this practice you will move your awareness through your body. If for any reason you find it difficult to let your attention rest with a particular body part, know that this is fine and simply guide your awareness back to your breathing. Allow your awareness to rest with your breathing until you are ready to continue. It is common to notice sensations as you focus on each area. Remember whatever sensations arise just notice them and allow them to be present. Although you may notice them shift through your presence and breathing, the goal is to simply allow the process to unfold.

3. Chest vs. Diaphragmatic Breathing

When you breathe you typically use one of two patterns:

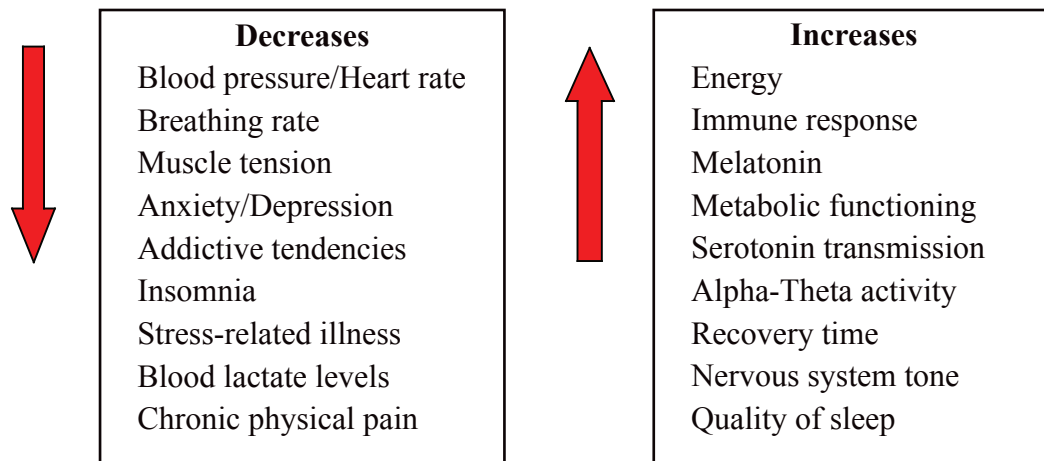
Chest breathing occurs when a breath is taken and the chest expands and the shoulders rise. The abdominal area contracts as if being drawn inward. Chest breathing is shallow and often irregular and rapid, leading to insufficient oxygen intake. If an inadequate amount of air reaches your lungs, your blood is not properly oxygenated, your heart rate and muscle tension increase, and the stress response is triggered. Chest breathing keeps the body in a more stressed state making it easy for any issue such as frustration, worry, impatience or discomfort to disrupt your level of balance. As a result of constant chest breathing, the average person is also said to hold their breath over 100 times per day further intensifying the stress response. The effects of chest breathing have been well documented. Research has substantiated that it causes a cascade of physical responses and adaptations that can have a significant impact on health and well-being. Such examples include;



Abdominal or Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing focuses on the diaphragm muscle, a sheet like, dome shaped muscle that separates your lungs and your abdomen. Your diaphragm facilitates your breathing by expanding and contracting as you inhale and exhale. Breathing through your abdomen or diaphragm is the natural breathing of newborn babies and sleeping adults. Inhaled air is drawn deep into the lungs and exhaled as the diaphragm contracts and expands. Breathing is even and non-constricting. The respiratory system is able to more effectively do its job of producing energy from oxygen and removing waste products. By increasing your awareness of your own breathing patterns and shifting to more abdominal breathing, you can reduce many of the symptoms listed. Diaphragmatic breathing initiates what is known as the relaxation response, a term identified by Harvard researcher Herbert Benson M.D. The relaxation response is the antithesis of the stress response. It is an integrated physiologic response originating in the hypothalamus that leads to a generalized decrease in central nervous system arousal. It creates virtually an opposite reparative response to the stress response. Numerous studies have documented the healing power of the relaxation response. Such examples include;

4. Physical and Psychological Benefits of Relaxation



5. Create a Sacred Space

Although relaxation can be practiced anywhere and everywhere it is helpful to dedicate time to a relaxation practice for 10 to 20 minutes each day. It is best to create time in your routine just for relaxation. This is your time to relax and be. Do your best to give this gift to yourself by creating a quiet space of solitude and aloneness to conduct your relaxation practice. Turn off the phone, close the door and put out the “Do not disturb sign”.

Create a sacred space in your home where you can connect with yourself, rest and rejuvenate. You may adorn this space with your favorite scents, a candle, pictures or symbols. Often people create an altar by using a table-top or dresser surface. The size of your altar is not important, just that it is meaningful to you. You might have a chair in front of a window or inside your home or in your backyard. Wherever this sacred space is located, it is important that it is a space just for you to be quiet and still.

6. Relaxation Posture Guidelines

Comfort is a good word to use when thinking of your breathing posture. ‘Com’ means ‘with’, and ‘fort’ means ‘strength’. Sitting comfortably therefore means sitting ‘with strength’.

- Find a comfortable position...standing, sitting or lying down.
- If you are standing or seated, rock slightly from side to side. Rock from front to back and establish the point at which your upper torso feels balanced on your hips.
- Align your spine from your tailbone to the top of your head. Do your best to allow your back to rest straight but not rigid. You might imagine there is a string extending from your tailbone to the top of your head keeping your spine gently aligned. Spinal alignment not only helps you stay alert, but also allows for a circulation of your chi, the vital life-force in the body. This increases energy, promotes tranquility and supports mindful awareness.

- Allow the weight of your head to fall directly down upon your spinal column. To accomplish this pull your chin in slightly.
- Close your mouth and breathe through your nose.
- Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth.
- If you are seated in a chair or lying on the floor, allow your legs to rest uncrossed next to each other.

7. Step-By-Step Instructions for Whole Body Relaxation

- Choose a position that is comfortable for you. Sitting upright or lying on your back with your hands resting on your lap or on either side of your body. Allow your eyes to gently close or to remain softly open.
- Begin by focusing on your breath. Noticing your inhale and your exhale. Observe your breath and notice the sensations in your torso as you breathe. As you breathe-in, observe what part of your body moves with the in-breath. As you breathe-out, observe what part of your body moves as you breathe-out.
- If you find your breathe is shallow and filling only your upper chest, ever so gently explore the possibility of allowing your breath to move a little more deeply in your lungs so that your stomach slightly rises with the in-breathe and gently falls with the out-breath.
- Allow yourself to feel the complete and total support of the surface on which you rest. Should your mind begin to wander at any time simply note that your mind has wandered and gently and firmly guide your awareness back to your breath and the sensations of the in-breath and out-breath. Thoughts come and go. They flow and they change. Simply note them when they arise and come back to your breath. Remember there is no need to push or force your body in any way. You are working with your body's own natural rhythm and wisdom. This deep breathing pattern helps the body to naturally release unneeded tensions.

- Become aware of how your body feels from the soles of your feet to the top of your head taking in your whole body.
- From this place of observing the whole of your body guide your awareness inside to the soles of your feet. Notice any sensations in the soles of your feet. As is comfortable for you just allow your feet to rest and relax. Imagine the muscles gently softening and releasing unneeded tensions.
- Now move your awareness into your ankles, calves and shins observing any sensations here. And as is comfortable, allow the muscles to gently rest and release tensions. Allow your lower legs to gently soften and relax.
- Move your awareness across your knees and into your thighs. Observe the feelings and sensations here in your thighs. Just being present, not attempting to change anything. And now observe both legs and feet. Listen to the feelings and sensations that arise just as they are. Allow your legs and feet to rest and relax.
- Bring your awareness to your hips, pelvis and buttocks. Listen to the feelings and sensations here. As is comfortable for you allow your hips, pelvis and buttocks to gently soften and relax.
- Guide your awareness to your lower back. Observe the sensations in your lower back. If you feel any area of tightness, tension or fatigue use your breath to sooth, by breathing in and imagining sending your breath right to that area, releasing and soothing any tension or fatigue. You might imagine the muscles in your lower back softening and releasing with each breath.
- Guide your awareness to the middle of your back. Allow this area of your body to gently release and let go.
- Bring your awareness to your upper back and up to your shoulders. Observe the sensations here. Again using your breath to sooth any area of tightness or discomfort by breathing-in and imagining sending your breath right to that area. Imagine the muscles all along your spine resting softly, calmly and at ease.
- Shift your awareness to your arms, your biceps, and forearms. Imagine these muscles releasing and letting go of unneeded tensions. And now allow the whole of your hands and arms to rest soft and relaxed.

- Bring your awareness to your chest and now your abdomen. Observe your abdomen as you breathe, notice the sensations. And as is comfortable, allowing the sensations to soften and relax. Allow the whole of your chest and abdomen to rest soft and relaxed.
- Shift your awareness to your neck. Notice if you would like to move your head. Use your breath to soothe this area. Breathe-in and imagine sending your breath right to that area. Breathe-out and release and soften that area. Gently allow this area of your body to release and let go.
- Bring your awareness to the back of your head and then the top of your head. Imagine these muscles releasing and letting go. Guide your awareness to your forehead, observe the sensations here and allow the muscles here to rest and soften. Guide your awareness to your eyes. Allow the muscles around your eyes to rest and now your cheeks and your jaw. As is comfortable allow your face to soften and relax.
- Imagine the feelings of relaxation gently infused inward so that all of your inner organs are gently touched by a quality of calm and relaxation. Return your awareness to your breathing. Take in your whole body from the soles of your feet to the top of your head. Listen to your experience just as it is. Experience your body as whole and complete.
- Now as you have tuned into your entire body, bring your awareness to any area that calls your attention the most. This might be an area of discomfort or just an area where you experienced the most sensation. Focus on the sensation in this part of your body letting it know that you know that it is there. And gently, with an air of curiosity, ask this sensation, “What message do you have for me? What wisdom would you like to share with me?” This answer may come in the form of a thought or an image. Just allow this to spontaneously come to your mind. Thank your body for any message it may or may not have shared with you.

Once again observe your breathing. Keep with you a feeling of calm as you now begin to move your awareness from your inner experience back to the room. You may wish to wiggle your toes or move your ankles back and forth. Moving slowly at first and keeping with you any nourishing elements from this experience.

8. Whole Body Relaxation Intention Statements

- *My mind is centered and clear.*
- *My body is calm and relaxed.*
- *With every breath I take I am more deeply relaxed.*
- *I let go and surrender into relaxation.*
- *I accept my body just as it is.*
- *I meet my body with compassion and an open heart.*
- *My body is strong and healthy.*
- *Relaxation comes easily to me.*
- *My mind is focused and centered.*
- *My heart is open and compassionate.*
- *I am healthy and vibrant.*
- *My whole body feels calm and relaxed.*
- *I am an active participant in my health and well-being.*
- *I fully receive my body's messages.*
- *I act in accordance with my mind and body wisdom.*
- *My mind and body are one.*

9. FAQ's

Is it normal to feel increased discomfort?

Although relaxation practices do not cause pain you may become more aware of pain that is just underneath the surface. As you relax and become increasingly present within, you are better able to hear your body's messages. The body's messages come in many forms but in general they are either pleasurable, neutral or unpleasurable. It is amazing how conditioned we can become to not feel emotions or physical sensations. This is especially true if you deal with chronic pain. Coping with pain, can include not dealing with it, distracting yourself from it or pushing it away. Although these options have their unique advantages, spending time actually listening to any signals of discomfort is important in releasing them. In general, relaxation practices such as this have been shown to decrease pain up to 40%.

What if I don't feel anything significant?

It can take awhile to learn to feel subtle sensations in the body. You need to tune your awareness into that level. At first this may feel like you are learning to understand a new language. Be sure you are open to very subtle sensations such as feeling tingly, light or waves of sensation. Trust the process to unfold naturally. Be patient and open to developing your fine tuned listening skills.

What if I don't receive a message from my body?

When first practicing this technique, it is not uncommon to feel as though your body is not responding. The messages may come in the form of a thought, an image or very subtle sensations. It is most important to listen with an open mind and an air of curiosity. This establishes a level of trust between the mind and body making it easier to hear the messages over time. Your body is always talking to you. It is a matter of learning its language and strengthening your ability to hear its messages.

How do I interpret the message I receive from my body?

First, ask your body what a message or sensation means: "How does this relate to my life? How can I use this message to grow?" Second, notice the patterns that arise as you practice this meditation. You will find a connection between particular sensations in your body and certain issues or circumstances in your life. You might choose to begin a journaling practice to support you in identifying your patterns.

Is it normal to get tired or to fall asleep?

So often the only time during the day that people breathe diaphragmatically is when they sleep, so yes it is very normal. Research demonstrates that waiting until sleep-time to get in your daily dose of homeostasis and relaxation is not enough. This is especially true if you are healing from a physical or psychological health challenge. Oxygen, nervous system balance and general homeostasis are key to healing. If you are practicing diaphragmatic breathing while lying down, than we suggest sitting or standing. Also check and make sure you have good posture as this helps regulate your chi or energy flow from your tailbone to the top of your head. Finally, focusing on your breath requires a certain level of commitment to stay alert and concentrate. If you are still falling asleep you may need more rest.

Is it normal for my mind to wander?

It is very normal for the mind to wander. Finding it challenging to focus or concentrate for even seconds at a time is frequently reported when beginning a breathing or meditation type practice. On one hand, a busy mind represents the busy world we live in. On the other hand, it is normal for the mind to wander as we are constantly thinking. In the beginning of your practice it can take time to decrease the amount of busyness in the mind and increase your ability to focus. The most helpful tip for working with the wandering mind is to become less attached to the fact that it wanders. This is called taking an ‘observers’ stance whereby you simply observe the thoughts as they come and go while staying centered on your breath. An analogy that we find helpful is to consider any distracting thoughts as clouds in the sky that are passing by.

10. BONUS BREATHING EXERCISE!

Alternate Nostril Breathing Research tells us that during a single day, one nostril dominates the breathing cycle for several hours before the other nostril takes over. The following breathing exercises can be used to calm your state if you are feeling stressed or anxious or increase your energy and vitality if you are feeling fatigued.

LEFT SIDE

When you are feeling stressed or anxious begin inhaling through your left nostril and exhaling through your right nostril. You will automatically begin to calm yourself. This is a helpful exercise to practice before going to sleep at night.

RIGHT SIDE

By activating the right side of the body it helps give you energy. This is a good breathing exercise to do if you are feeling tired or fatigued. Begin breathing through your right nostril and exhaling through your left nostril. **Steps:**

1. Sit in a comfortable position with good posture.
2. Rest the index and second finger of your right hand on your forehead.
3. Close your right nostril with your thumb.
4. Inhale slowly and through your left nostril.
5. Close your left nostril with your ring finger and simultaneously open your right nostril by removing your thumb.
6. Exhale slowly and soundlessly and as thoroughly as possible through your right nostril.
7. Inhale through your right nostril.
8. Close your right nostril with your thumb and open your left nostril.
9. Exhale through your left nostril.
10. Inhale through your left nostril.

Begin by doing 5 cycles. Then slowly raise the number from 10 to 25 cycles.

Enjoy Your Whole Body Relaxation!