

# Mind-Body Methods for Active Lifestyles

**Mindfulness**, now a popular term with many applications, can be simplified as **the experience of awareness in the present moment**. It involves observing our thoughts and keeping our mind focused on a task until complete. Being aware of our emotions is also part of mindfulness, as is being fully present in our bodies in both stillness *and* movement. Although the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of mindfulness seem to be separate, they often intersect in our day to day lives. Contrary to common belief, mindfulness is not reserved solely for Yogi's or people who spend a lot of time on a meditation cushion.

**Here are 5 simple practices to cultivate a mind-body connection within an active lifestyle:**

## 1. Stretch gradually with an emphasis on relaxation

Stretching should be approached gently and gradually to reap the full benefits and avoid injury. When you are performing each stretch, pay attention on the muscles(s) you are lengthening. Start at a moderate stretch, notice when you reach and pass the stretch reflex, and only deepen your stretch once you've relaxed into the current level of stretch.



## 2. Exercise with kinesthetic sense



Do you rush through your workout just to get it done? Do you find you can be clumsy or off balance in your movements sometimes? Kinesthetic sense is the state of awareness of our body at any given time. This includes a sense of position, equilibrium and feeling of our muscles and joints. Kinesthetic sense can be enhanced through keeping your mind on the physical task at hand.

### 3. Tune in to your surroundings



Going for a hike this summer? This is one example of an opportune time to practice tuning into your surroundings. Start with the feeling of your feet being grounded on the earth. Pay attention to the sounds around you: birds chirping, the wind, and twigs snapping on the trail. Take in all the colors and textures with your eyes. Foresee where your next step is landing.

### 4. Calm and deepen your breathing

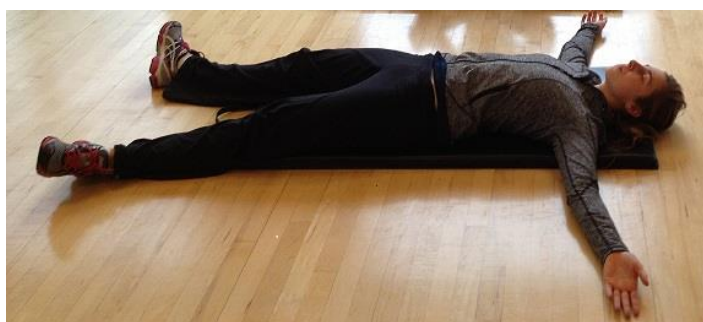
How many times a day do you take a moment to stop and become aware of how you are breathing? This is the fastest most direct way to experience a mind-body connection because the breath is intertwined in our physical, mental and emotion being, allowing us to directly access these states simultaneously.



1. Find a comfortable position
2. Close your eyes or soften your gaze
3. Soften into your body
4. Breathe gently through your nostrils
5. Pay attention to the sensation of the inflow and outflow of each breath
6. Let your abdomen expand lightly as you inhale, and draw in gently as you exhale
7. As it's comfortable, narrow the back of your throat as you exhale, elongating your breath out, sedating your nervous system
8. Maintain this exercise as long as it suits you
9. If you wish, incorporate an internal count of 4 on inhale, and exhale of 8. You may also add a pause or hold of 1-2 counts before each exhalation.
10. Relax into this process so it is as effortless as possible

## 5. Do a body scan to raise awareness

The objective of the body scan is to get in touch with the different regions of your body, and allow yourself to experience how each part feels. The body scan moves from a narrow to a wider focus of attention; from focusing on your little toe all the way through the entire body. The objective could be to observe each part of the body without judgement or adjustments, or can include a conscious release of tension as you journey through the body. The body scan trains your mind to be able to move from detailed attention to a wider and more spacious awareness.



Begin lying down. Start by focusing your attention at the top of your head and then move down the body, or you can start at the feet and work your way up. Bring all your conscious awareness to each toe, finger, etc. as you move through the body.

Pressed for time? Try this [3-min Body Scan Practice](#)