

Chapter 5

RELAXATION



Learning how to relax
is one of the more significant skills
taught on the Lifestyle Management Course.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we explore the rhythm that affects our swing between activity and rest.

We will go on to learn the Belly Breathing technique that serves as an anti-stress first-aid remedy.

Mindfulness will help us notice our world and our own state of being. From this insightful technique we can regain control over our stress levels.

Belly breathing and relaxation-using the breath and dynamic noticing techniques - will help us to keep our concerns and worries under control.



**We know that relaxation is beneficial
and that it feels good.**

Here's why.

Let's begin by exploring.....ULTRADIAN RHYTHMS.

At a given, specific moment, our bodies naturally „rev“ themselves up and we feel motivated to do things.

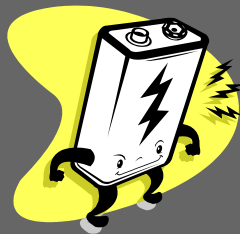
Approximately every 90 minutes, our bodies begin to settle down into a relaxed state lasting for about 20 minutes or so.

If we've been busy, our minds start to daydream, we lose a degree of concentration, and our bodies feel the need for a „rest“ break.

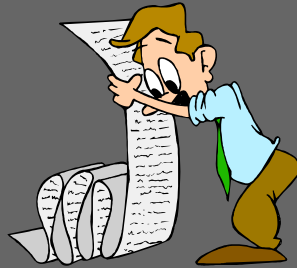
This **ultradian rhythm** - or 2 hour cycle - is our natural activity-rest pattern throughout the day.

Our brains naturally move into this restful and daydreamy state, allowing our bodies to carry out essential recovery from the accumulation of stress and strain during the last period of activity.

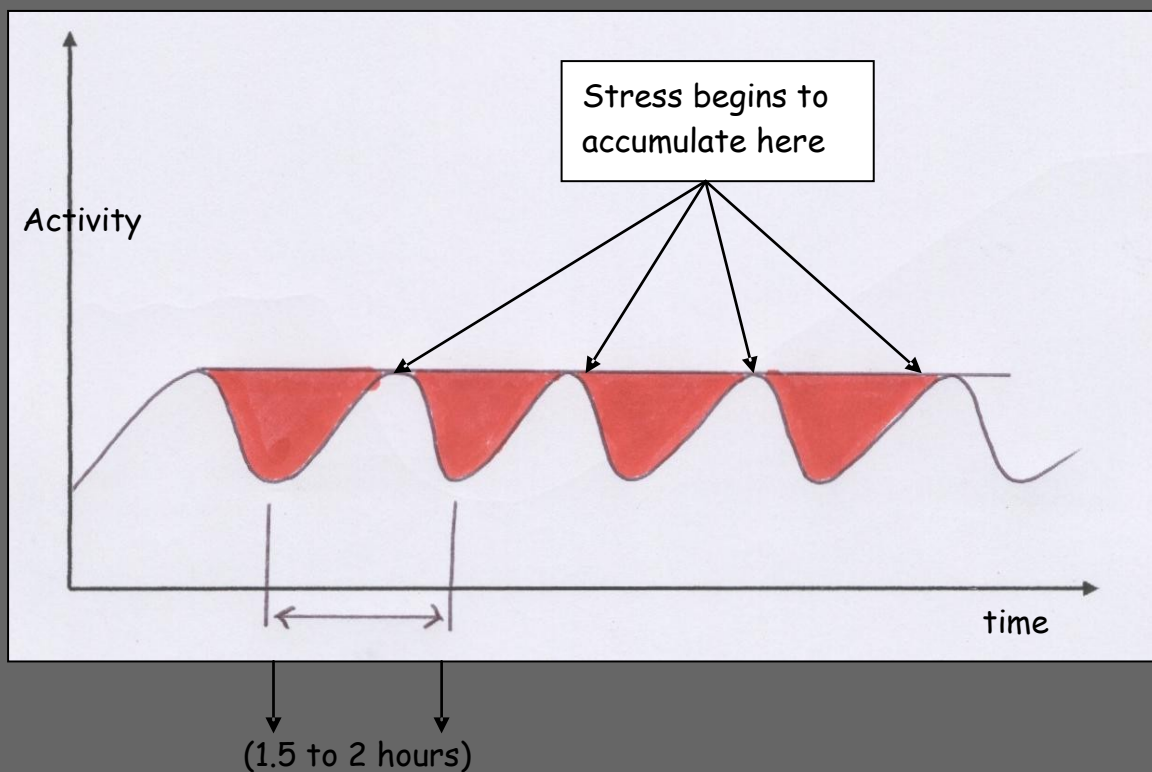
Put simply, it's like having a built-in system for recharging our batteries.



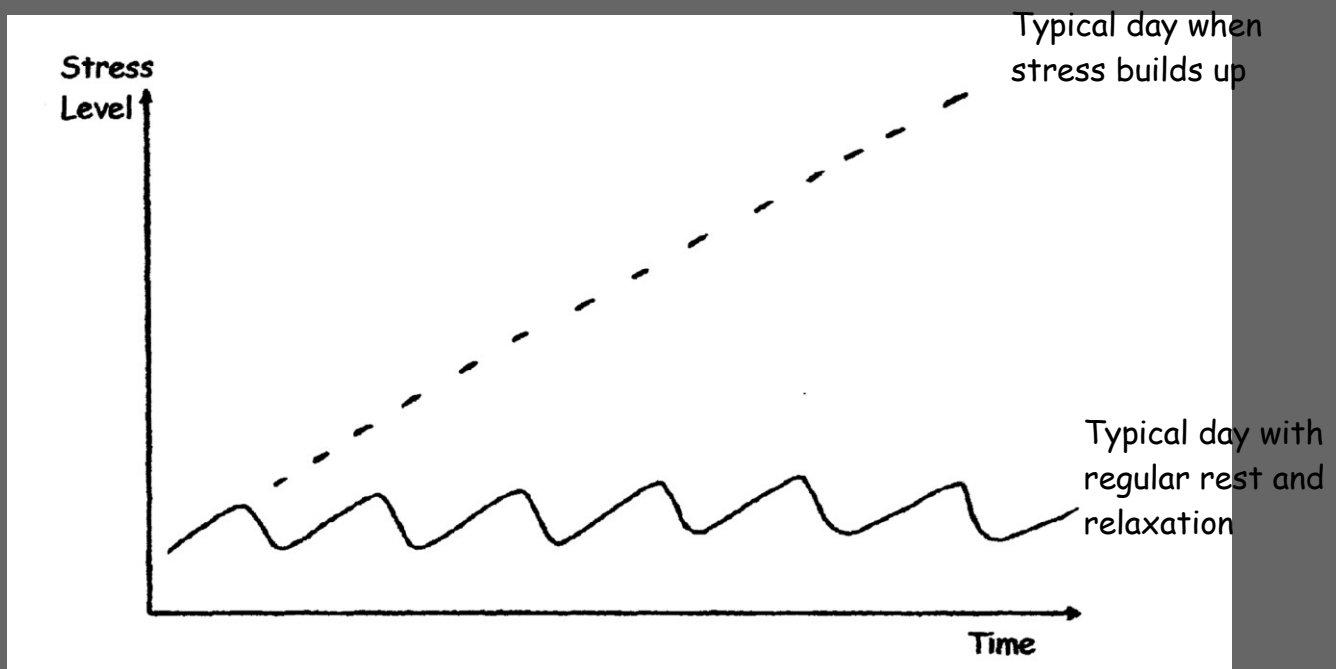
However, if we ignore this rhythm and choose to be active when our minds and bodies indicate the need for rest, stress will accumulate in our mind/body systems.



The diagram below shows the Ultradian Cycle and the critical points where rest and relaxation should be encouraged.



It might now be clear that
one of the aims of relaxation
is to stop stress building up. We can do this by
taking regular recovery breaks throughout the day.



You may feel more confident about
practising relaxation techniques
if you bear in mind that being relaxed
is normally
OUR NATURAL STATE.

Being in this relaxed daydreamy "trance" state is more common than we might think.

It is happening whenever we "lose the room"...



Here are some examples:-



Being engrossed in
a book or TV programme



Highway hypnosis



Runner"s „high"

THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

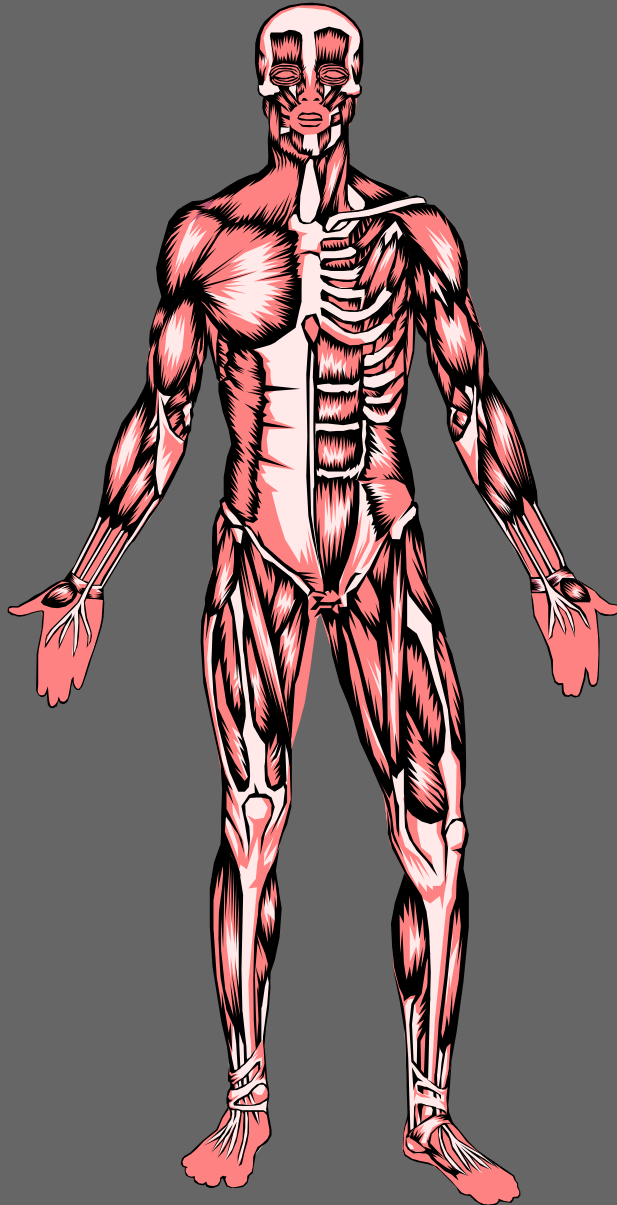
The anatomical drawing below shows the main physical responses to the state of relaxation.

Clear
thinking.

Breathing
easier.

Improved
digestion.

Relaxed
muscles.



Relaxed eyes.

Heart rate
slows down.

Warm hands.
Dry hands.

Improved
balance.

This response is exactly the
opposite of the stress (fight or flight) response.

There is NO MEDICATION as powerful
as the relaxation response for dealing with stress and
the symptoms of stress.

THE EFFECTS OF RELAXATION MAY INCLUDE:-

- Body feeling lighter or heavier
- Tingling sensations
- Warmth
- A sense of floating or expansiveness
- Easy breathing
- Reduced discomfort
- A sense of energy streaming through the body
- Blissfulness
- Sense of timelessness
- An afterglow



Other benefits of regular deep relaxation practice are:-

- A lessening of a sense of urgency in life
- An easing of tensions
- Lowered anxiety
- Less irritability
- Improved physical co-ordination and athletic performance
- Greater energy, productivity and work satisfaction
- Enhanced creativity
- Increased clarity of thought
- Greater self-acceptance

**And over 40 years of medical research on meditation show
benefit for people with:-**

Hypertension

Coronary heart disease

Angina Pectoris

High cholesterol

Diabetes

Insomnia

Addictive behaviour

Asthma

Epilepsy

Psoriasis

Chronic pain

Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

In this course we will focus on
three "informal" relaxation techniques
which can be practised as we go throughout the day,
and two "formal" relaxation techniques
which require time put aside every day for practice.

These are:-

Informal

- Practising Mindfulness (or noticing)
- Relaxed Belly Breathing
- 7 - 11 Breathing



Formal

- Mindfulness Meditation
- Body Scan



Informal Technique 1

Practising Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

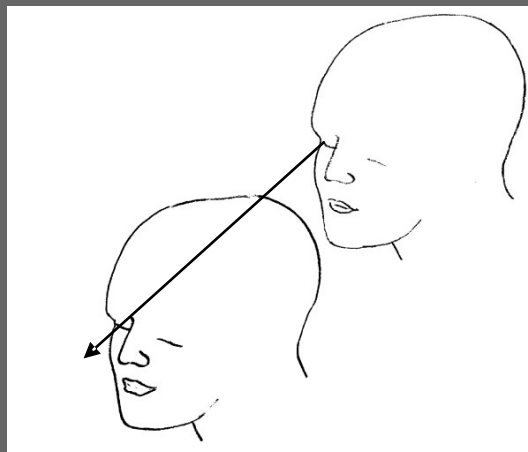
Mindfulness is about being aware of what is going on in our bodies and our minds as we go through the day.

It requires us to be able to step back into what is called our "Observer Self".

It's about stepping back from our situation and learning to RESPOND rather than REACT in a knee-jerk way to what is going on.

We step back into our Observer Self when we practise Mindfulness and Body awareness.

When we pull back a bit, we can remove our focus from our life situations and imagine more effective ways of doing things.



**It's not such a strange idea
when you think about it.**

Informal Technique 2

Relaxed Belly Breathing



When you are stressed,
your body reacts by breathing differently.

This happens because, when you are stressed,
your breathing gets faster and shallower as your body
prepares for action.

This way of breathing can become a habit, and sometimes people can experience uncomfortable physical symptoms such as tingling, dizziness and muscle pain.

Small children, on the other hand, breathe beautifully from their bellies.

A simple way to relax
is by copying their simple but effective
relaxed belly breathing.

In an ideal, quiet, peaceful world, this would be our natural breathing style. In the real world, the technique still helps prevent stress building up.

It is quick and easy to do and you can do it anywhere.

Learning how to do Relaxed Belly Breathing

**The easiest way to do this exercise in the beginning
is to
lie down on a mat.**

Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly, just below your ribs.

Breathe in through your nose.

Notice your belly begin to rise and keep the movement gentle.

Your chest can stay fairly still.

Relaxed breathing doesn't mean trying to breathe deeply.

This will happen naturally.

Slowly and evenly, let the breath out through your nose and feel your belly sinking.

You may feel the release of tension as you let go of the breath.

Breathe at a pace that feels natural for you.

Be aware of the hand on your belly rising while the hand on your upper chest hardly moves.

**It is important to practise this exercise often at
first.**

This breathing technique
can feel odd in the early stages of learning
because it is the
opposite of what we usually do
when taking a deep breath.



Some useful tips for Belly Breathing

- Use relaxed breathing regularly - **before** you are aware of feeling wound up - to prevent the build-up of the stress response.
- If you are already feeling wound up, the breathing can help you to feel more relaxed.
- One or two breaths every hour or so each day is ideal.
- Match the relaxed breathing with your normal routines so that it becomes easy to remember to do it.

For instance:-

every time you take a break, make a drink or go to a certain part of the house, **stop** and take one or two relaxed breaths.



If your watch has an alarm function, you could set it to remind you at regular intervals.

Remember !!!

You don't need to stop what you are doing to breathe in a relaxed way.

But, Belly Breathing is only the beginning.
Let's now consider **another powerful technique** that can help with anxiety attacks, either as a preventative measure or as a tool to recover control.

Informal Technique 3

7 - 11 Breathing

(Or simply making sure your out-breath lasts longer than your in-breath.)

**You may have noticed when you practised
Relaxed Belly Breathing
that the out-breath became longer than the in-breath
as you became more relaxed.**

This is the opposite of tense breathing. When we are anxious, we breathe 1 - 1. The time it takes us to breathe in is equal to the time it takes us to breathe out.

Practising lengthening the out-breath is a very effective anxiety management technique, because the mind finds it difficult to be anxious when the body acts as if it were relaxed by copying a relaxed breathing style.

This technique is called 7 - 11 Breathing.

Counting up to 7 on an in-breath
and then counting to 11 on an out-breath
(making sure it is longer than the in-breath).

Or

If that is too long, you could try:-
Breathing in for 1 and breathing out for 1,2,3

or

Breathing in for 1,2,3 and breathing out for 1,2,3,4,5

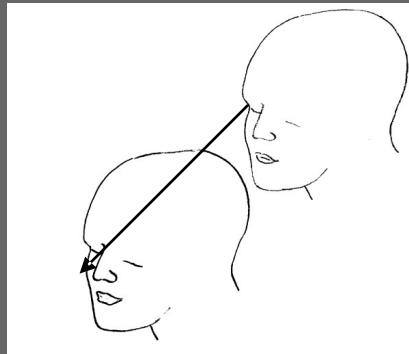
or

Breathing in for 1,2,3,4,5 and breathing out for 1,2,3,4,5,6,7

You can also try it out when exercising or out walking.

Formal Technique 1

Mindfulness Meditation



In the busy lives we lead today, we spend a lot of time and energy being in an active state, either physically or mentally – a constant state of “doing”.

We are always looking for the next task we feel we must do: the phone calls we should make; the paperwork we must catch up on; the jobs we have to do, and so on.

This becomes our way of living. We fill our time with business (busy-ness) and forget or even push away our ability to simply „be“.

**We need a time for stillness and peace
in order to restore some balance – and some perspective – to our lives.**

Meditation is a wonderful way of stopping this headlong momentum of “doing”. It gives us some time to dwell in a state of **deep relaxation**. We need to take time to remember who we are.

**We can use meditation to balance our minds,
to regain clarity and to develop patience.**

**This inner stillness
reduces the pressure and busy-ness we associate with the reality of our lives.**

The physiological, emotional and mental state we can develop as we practise meditation is the very opposite of the constant „stress“ state in which we normally find ourselves.

Meditation at its heart is really about non-doing. It is about just experiencing a sense of **“BEING”**. We are realising how precious the moments we have are right now. By enjoying them fully and living our lives in a more peaceful way, we become **MINDFUL**.

Script for Formal Relaxation Technique 1

This technique is described on the CD.

Mindfulness Meditation

Begin this exercise by sitting or lying at ease, making sure that your spine feels long and that your neck does not feel shortened in any way.

Rest your hands comfortably.

Close your eyes.

You can notice any noises within the room and then just outside the room.

Then focus your attention upon your breath.

- Can you hear your breath?
- Can you feel your breath?
- Do you notice the change in temperature of your breath as you breathe in cooler air and breathe out slightly warmer air? Feel this flow of air in your throat.
- Are you aware of a gentle rise and fall in your ribcage as you breathe in and out?
- You may even feel a rise in your belly as you breathe in and a falling in your belly as you breathe out. If you can't feel it that is fine. Just enjoy the easy flow of your breath as you breathe in and out.
- Notice if your breathing feels fast or slow.
- Notice if your breathing is shallow or deep.
- You don't have to change anything at all - just noticing is fine.
- Begin to focus on your breathing, perhaps following your breathing all the way in and all the way out. Breathing in and breathing out. In and out.
Follow the rhythm of your breathing.

What to expect when meditating

Very quickly you may notice that you become distracted by thoughts, cares, concerns, things to do etc.

This is a natural part of meditation. Notice when this happens, and gently guide your focus away from thoughts and back to the rhythm of your breathing.

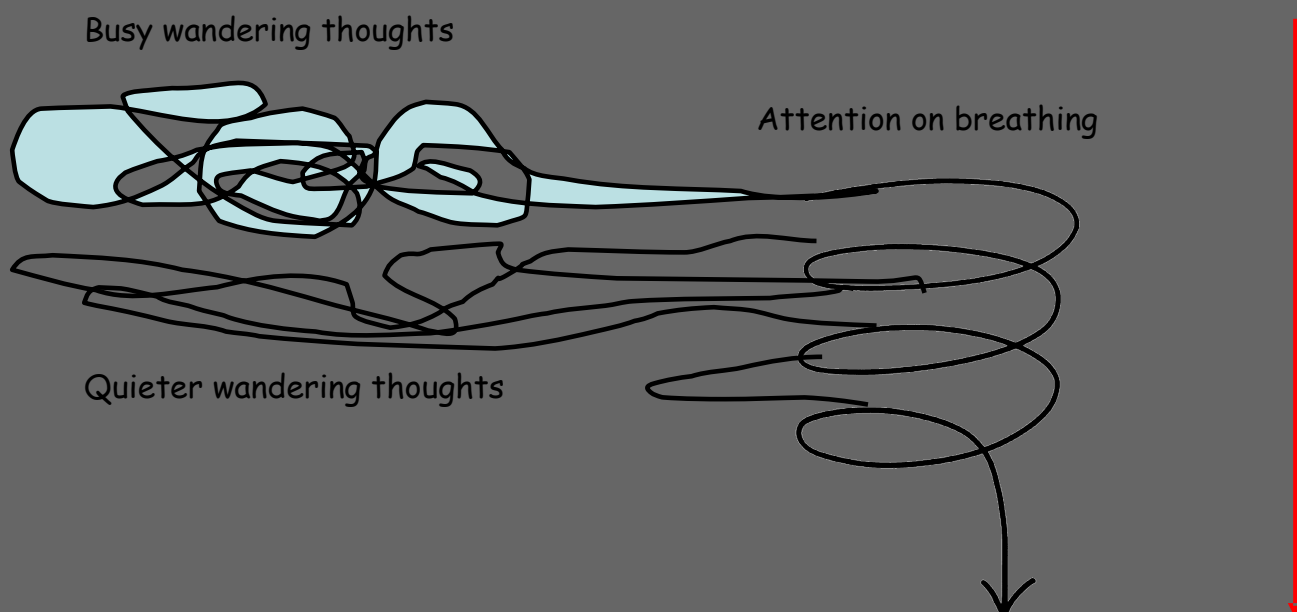
Follow this flow for several minutes, gently allowing your attention to rest on your breathing whenever you notice it has wandered elsewhere again.

As you follow your breath you may notice your body beginning to rest more deeply and a quiet, calm peacefulness coming into your mind. Simply let go and enjoy your breath - this is a wonderful tool we have with us always - it allows us to be mindful of the moments we have right now, letting ourselves simply enjoy and experience each unique and special moment as it comes - feeling more alive, relaxed and joyful as we do so.

The following diagram demonstrates what happens naturally in our minds when we meditate.

Meditation is a natural flow between our thoughts wandering and our attention coming back to our breathing.

Back & forward - Back & forward
Going deeper
Noticing quieter thoughts
Deeper - quieter - deeper



There is no effort required to enter into deep relaxation
and wandering thoughts are a part of
the deep relaxation technique.

When you notice your thoughts, gently allow your attention to drift back
to your breathing and this easy, effortless flow between noticing our
thoughts and drifting back to our breathing and back and again and
again and continuing

This is deep relaxation
and forms the basis of any meditation technique.

Back and forward.....and down intodeep relaxation.

How to handle a busy mind

If you fight a busy mind you'll get more stressed,
so give yourself permission to be busy and notice what happens!

"I can't switch off"

You can switch off to relax and you can stay alert and relax.
It's ok either way.

"I'm too stressed to relax"

It is ok to feel stressed as you relax.

- What do you notice when you're stressed?
- What do you hear your mind saying?
- What sensations do you feel in your body?
- What happens as you notice these thoughts and sensations?

"Thoughts just go round and around"

That's ok. Noticing that is a part of meditation.

"I try to let go but I can't"

You can try to relax and you don't have to.
Deep relaxation needs no effort.

"My mind keeps wandering"

This is the deep relaxation technique.

"I can't concentrate on just one thing"

You can try to do this if you want to but it's not necessary.
It's ok to allow your mind to wander.

How often should I meditate?

- Do a 20 minute meditation session twice per day
- Starting with 5 minutes
- Then 10 - 12 -14 -16 -18 - 20 minutes
- Do a regular belly breathing routine -
14 times per day (and more if you're feeling anxious)

How long does it take to get good at relaxation?

Maybe up to



16
WEEKS

Formal Technique 2

Body Scan



Another very powerful technique is known as Body Scanning. It involves lying on your back and moving your mind through the different regions of your body.

The idea in scanning your body is to actually feel each region you focus on and linger there with your mind right on it or in it.

You breathe into and out from each region a few times and then let go of it in your mind's eye as your attention moves on to the next region.

Body Scanning is especially good for where there is a particular region of the body that is problematic or painful.

It is very effective for managing pain.

Script for Formal Relaxation Technique 2

This technique is described on the CD.

Body Scan

Begin this exercise by lying on your back in a comfortable place, making sure your spine and neck feel long. Use pillows behind your knees or head if it makes you feel more comfortable.

Close your eyes

Notice the gentle rise and fall of your belly with each in-breath and out-breath.

Take a few moments to feel your body as a „whole“, from your head down to your toes. Notice the weight of your body where it is in contact with the floor.

Bring your attention to the toes of your left foot and direct or „channel“ your breath into them, taking your breath all the way down into your toes, and all the way out again through your nose.

Notice any sensations you may feel in your toes. If you don't feel anything, that's OK. Just notice that fact in a non-judgmental way.

When you are ready to move on, take a deeper breath all the way into your toes, feeling any tension there leaving on your outward breath.

Move your attention next to the sole of your foot and direct or „channel“ your breath into that area as you did with the toes.

Continue in this way, moving your attention to the heel, top of the foot and then the ankle, breathing into each area in turn and noticing any sensations you may be feeling in that area, letting go, and moving on.

If you find that your attention has wandered off at any point, just gently bring your thoughts back to the breathing and the area you are focusing on.

In this way, gradually work your way round the body, working slowly up the left leg and repeating the process for the right leg, starting again at the toes.

Continue your meditation by working your way systematically round the body.

Here is a route you may find helpful.
You could use your own if you prefer.

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Toes | Small of back | Throat |
| Soles of feet | Around to belly | Nape of neck |
| Heels | Up spine | Over scalp |
| Top of feet | Around to ribcage | Forehead |
| Ankles | Shoulders | Around eyes |
| Calf muscles | Upper arms | Nose |
| Knees | Elbows | Cheeks |
| Front of thighs | Lower arms | Mouth |
| Back of thighs | Wrists, hands, fingers | Jaws |
| Buttocks | Back up to shoulders | Tongue |

Once you have been round
all areas of the body,
spend a moment or two just
following your breathing and noticing
the feelings you are experiencing in your body
as a whole.

