

Body Scan - Automatic Pilot

by Zindel Segal, MD, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*

In a car, we can sometimes drive for miles “on automatic pilot,” without really being aware of what we are doing. In the same way, we may not be really “present,” moment-by-moment, for much of our lives: We can often be “miles away” without knowing it.

On automatic pilot, we are more likely to have our “buttons pressed”: Events around us and thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the mind (of which we may be only dimly aware) can trigger old habits of thinking that are often unhelpful and may lead to a worsening mood.

By becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations - from moment to moment - we give ourselves the possibility of greater freedom and choice; we do not have to go into the same old “mental ruts” that may have caused problems in the past.

The aim of this program is to increase awareness so that we can respond to situations with choice rather than react automatically. We do that by practicing to become more aware of where our attention is, and deliberately changing the focus of attention, over and over again.

To begin with, we use attention to different parts of the body as a focus to anchor our awareness in the moment. We will also be training ourselves to put attention and awareness in different places at will. This is the aim of the body scan exercise that is the main homework for this week.