

A4. Mindful Stretch Exercise

Begin by standing with your feet flat on the ground, hip-width apart. [Pause.] Notice how it feels to stand here [pause], noticing the sensations of the ground beneath your feet and the sensations in your body right now. Allow your shoulders to relax as best you can, and be present in your body. [Pause.] Start to bring your awareness to your breath and your stomach, being here, standing here, and breathing. [Pause five seconds.]

If you can, slowly begin to move your arms out to the side of your body. Gently allow your arms to move upward, bringing awareness to the environment around your arms, noticing whatever sensations are here as your arms rise. [Pause.] And gently bring the arms upward, slowly and mindfully until they're right up over your head, reaching for the sky. [Pause.]

Now, very gently, begin to move your arms over to the right so your body is slightly bending over. You might notice your hips moving slightly out to the left. [Pause.] Just notice whatever sensations you experience during this stretch. And, when you feel ready, move your arms back to center.

Next, allow your arms to move over to the left side. Your hips may move over to the right and your body very gently bends to the left. Just notice the sensations of the stretch. Then, very slowly, mindfully come back up to the center, and gently lower your arms to your sides. Notice whatever sensations that are here; notice any tendency for the arms to rush back to the side of your body. [Pause five seconds.]

When your arms reach your sides, just notice how your body is feeling right now. Notice any sensations of having done this stretch and being present, standing here with your feet on the ground, breathing and being aware of your breath. [Pause five seconds.]

Now, allow your hands to rest on your hips so your elbows are out to the sides. Settle into this posture, and, with your hips and feet still facing forward, very gently turn your upper body to the right. Keep your feet and hips facing forward, your upper body and shoulders moving to the right, just as far as they'll go. Not pushing anything, just gently twisting your body as far as it wants to be twisted right now. Then, gently, mindfully, come back to the center.

And now, gently twist your body to the left. Your feet steady on the ground, your hips facing forward, your shoulders and your upper body gently turned to the left as far as they will go. Then, gently coming back to the center, noticing the sensations of the stretch. Now, allow your arms to fall to the sides of your body. [Pause five seconds.]

Slowly move your head toward your right shoulder, gently stretching your neck just as far as it wants to go, noticing the sensation. Now, slowly come back to the center. Then, gently move your head to your left shoulder, mindfully stretching. Just noticing how your body feels right now. Then, bring your head back to the center and settle into this posture. [Pause five seconds.]

Come back to standing with your feet flat on the floor, your arms resting by your side, your shoulders back, your head straight, just resting here in this pose. Bring your awareness to your stomach and the rise and fall as you breathe in, and as you breathe out. Stand here in awareness, breathing, noticing how your body feels having done these stretches. [Pause.]

And, as this period of practice comes to an end, just rest here, and when you move away from this posture, see if you can bring mindfulness to your body as you move on into the day.