

## CHAPTER 2

# Foundations of Mindful Movement

If one thing, O monks, is developed and cultivated, the body is calmed, the mind is calmed, discursive thoughts are quieted, and all wholesome states that partake of supreme knowledge reach fullness of development. What is that one thing? It is mindfulness directed to the body.

—ANGUTTARA NIKAYA (in Thera & Bodhi, 2010, p. 9)

“Human experience is incarnated.” So begins the introduction to Drew Leder’s *The Absent Body* (1990), an exploration of practical and philosophical implications of our increasingly “disembodied” way of life. One of the great contributions of mindfulness is its emphasis on awareness of experience, starting with the body, reminiscent of psychotherapeutic applications of somatic awareness (Bakal, 1999). This chapter explores body-centered aspects of mindfulness in two ways, one historical, the other related to clinical practice. First, I describe how the concept of mindful movement comes from Buddhism, with its emphasis on awareness of the body, and the Hindu tradition of yoga, a spiritual tradition emphasizing the unity of mind and body. From there the focus shifts to developing mindfulness-based practices you as a clinician can practice and teach. Both themes converge on the question, “What are you aware of as you move?” Bringing focused attention to movement involves discovering the flow of sensations occurring within the body with every step we take. Physical movement can be a source of great pleasure, but also of distress. Whether it is one or the other, or something in between, depends on the nature and qualities of accompanying sensations and how we interpret them.

### PAUSE AND REFLECT

Do you associate “mindfulness” primarily with the mind? If so, you may be overlooking the fundamental importance of the body as an object of focused attention. Most meditation practices begin with awareness of the breath, not mental events. Can you focus on the physical sensations of breathing in and breathing out? How long can you do this before your mind wanders off? It takes patience and practice to develop a capacity for sustained attention of the breath, or most anything else for that matter.

### **Buddhism, Yoga, and Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is historically rooted in Buddhism, where it is one element of the eightfold path, a prescription for attaining wisdom and enlightenment based on ethical, selfless, and compassionate living (Gunaratana, 2001). The eightfold path in turn is one of four noble truths that sit at the heart of Buddhist philosophy. These noble truths are: (1) There is suffering; (2) suffering is caused; (3) there can be an end to suffering; and (4) following the eightfold path leads to cessation of suffering. Suffering, often translated as “unsatisfactoriness,” may be defined as the inability to accept things as they are, as opposed to how we would like them to be. Thoughts like “I wish I felt more like exercising” and “I’d be more active if it weren’t for my chronic pain” illustrate in a simple way how nonacceptance intrudes into everyday life. In both instances practicing mindfulness would enable you to acknowledge and reflect on the occurrence of these thoughts with discernment and compassion. “Can I accept that things are different than I would like them to be?” “Is there a way to be active while acknowledging the presence of ambivalence and pain?” Mindfulness is a way to make living an extended practice of awareness and compassion.

Yoga is an ancient Indian spiritual tradition emphasizing integration of mind and body. It encompasses a wide range of practices, some that include movement and some that do not, but all are united by a philosophical treatise attributed to the Indian sage Patanjali (Carrico, 1997). Hatha yoga is the most widely practiced form in Western culture, serving as the basis for many contemporary derivatives. Yoga became popular in the United States during the fitness era of the 1970s and 1980s, a trend that has continued and expanded to the present day. Initially met with skepticism because of its spiritual connotations, yoga is now routinely taught in many fitness centers, physical education classes, schools, and some clinics. Like Buddhism, yoga originally advocated a prescriptive

approach to living a skillful, principled life, though it differed in the sense that the major goal was transcendent spiritual enlightenment, rather than the more pragmatic Buddhist cessation of suffering. In yoga, physical discipline was one of several steps along the road to enlightenment, embodied in postures known as asanas that are now taught in yoga classes. A significant contemporary connection between Buddhism and yoga was established by Jon Kabat-Zinn, whose mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program incorporates Buddhist-inspired sitting meditation and the physical practice of yoga. Uniting both is the emphasis on nonjudgmental, present-moment awareness, or mindfulness.

Virtually all contemplative, spiritual, and religious traditions, including Buddhism and yoga, employ meditative practices to focus attention and calm the mind's incessant activity. They recognize the value of centering oneself so as not to be distracted by thoughts about the past or future, which cloud awareness of the present. Ordinarily, much of our time is spent in a state similar to sleep walking, our behavior propelled more by habit than by conscious awareness. Fortunately, the body offers a solution to this problem by providing an array of present-moment sensations on which to focus attention.

#### PAUSE AND REFLECT

Take some time right now to pause, set the book aside, close your eyes, and bring into awareness a regular, ongoing physical sensation like the breath or your heartbeat. Stay with it for a while, focus your attention on it, just resting in awareness without trying to do something or change anything. When your mind wanders off, gently bring it back to the physical sensation. After 3 or 4 minutes (you may want to set a quiet timer), open your eyes and continue reading.

Reflecting on this experience, can you appreciate how directing attention to body sensations can reduce mental distractibility? Giving your mind just one thing to focus on reduces thinking about past or future concerns. With practice, you can learn to sustain attention to body sensations for longer periods of time to help settle the mind.

### **Body Awareness as a Core Mindfulness Practice**

At any moment, there are countless events we can attend to, but only a few become the object of focused attention. Awareness of the body, either at rest or in motion, involves developing sensitivity to often subtle sensations, such as what it feels like to take a single step. This is why walking is often used as a form of meditation. However, few of us are either not patient

or skilled enough to engage in this sort of introspection, which is why it's referred to as a practice, or a process that develops over time. Most of the time there's too much going on around us, as we make our way from one place to another, to pay careful attention to something as basic as walking. Furthermore, introspection (often mistaken for self-absorption) doesn't come naturally, as philosopher Eric Schwitzgebel noted in his book, *Perplexities of Consciousness* (Schwitzgebel, 2011).

Actually, practicing paying attention to the body isn't especially difficult, nor does it require special equipment or complicated training. All that's required is persistence, curiosity, and an open mind. Zen master Yun-men's observation, "In walking, just walk. In sitting, just sit. Above all, don't wobble" is pertinent here. Clients or anyone else new to mindful awareness can readily tell the difference between walking and standing, for example, by focusing on sensations associated with each. Mindfulness offers an opportunity to become attuned to the body both at rest and in motion. Beginning with sensations of quiet sitting, progressing to simple movements like raising an arm or leg, then moving on to more complex movements constitutes a natural continuum of attention-focusing experiences.

To become accustomed to the subjective experience of physical exertion, start with slow, gentle movements. In addition to the intrinsic value of enhancing body awareness, starting slowly lays a foundation for progressing to higher levels of physical exertion. (Those higher levels, described in Chapter 1, are associated with well-documented health benefits. But they may be at levels beyond what most people are initially either accustomed to or capable of.) Box 2.1 is a movement sequence that exemplifies paying careful attention, one that requires strength, balance, and coordination. As with all the practices in this book, try it on your own before sharing it with clients. Though it may not seem to challenge you physically, it's worth doing to practice moment-by-moment awareness. And for anyone who does find it challenging to stand, sit, or walk, the experience of practicing the exercise in Box 2.1 may evoke interest in developing the necessary strength and balance, or just acknowledgement of the challenge it poses without regret or self-criticism.

### **Key Aspects of Sitting, Standing, and Walking**

There are two ways to benefit from this practice. The first is simply to bring mindful awareness to an otherwise automated behavior. The second is to conduct a self-appraisal of how easy or challenging it is to perform everyday movements. Suppose, for example, standing and walking a few feet is stressful and physically demanding. What if your breathing is labored, your legs feel like lead, and every step is like walking in wet,

**BOX 2.1. Sitting, Standing, and Walking**

This practice involves three of four common configurations of the body, namely sitting, standing, and walking (the fourth is lying down). These are everyday behaviors we engage in frequently, often in a coordinated series of movements. The question is, how attentive are you to everyday activities such as these? Usually not very attentive at all, because the movements are so functional and repetitive. So as you do this practice, pay careful attention to the experience of setting the body in motion, especially if you've been sedentary for a period of time. Begin by sitting in a chair, and be aware that you are sitting, feet on the floor and with an awareness of the contact your body is making with the contours of the chair. Now slowly begin the process of coming to standing, noticing how the upper body tilts forward, the knees extend beyond the ankles, and the muscles of the upper leg above the knees contract, acting against the force of gravity. If you need to, place the palms of the hands on the upper thighs to support the weight of the upper body as you come to standing upright. The transition from sitting to standing may be effortful, especially if you are moving slowly; just center your attention on the moment-by-moment experience. Once you are upright, let the body adjust to standing, taking time to do this. And now, once you are in a balanced position, begin walking slowly away from the chair, paying close attention to each step as you move. Slowly walk around the room or space you're in, taking time to focus on the experience of just moving. Eventually, come back to the chair and mindfully come to sitting, giving careful attention to the process of doing so. When you are seated and fully supported by the chair, let go of any sense of effort and rest for a moment.

*Check-In:* What sensations were you aware of while sitting in the chair? How slowly or rapidly did you come to standing? Did you feel a sense of effort as you stood up? If so, where in your body were you most aware of this?

heavy sand? If you feel like this, the widely proclaimed, “feel good” benefits of physical activity will seem like an unrealistic fantasy (Ekkekakis & Dafernos, 2012). Instead, you're more likely to feel self-critical and wonder what's wrong with you. Approaching the experience mindfully, you could just notice the unpleasant sensations and accompanying thoughts without further elaboration, and perhaps even view them as a gift of awareness. Regardless, it's helpful to know that initiating behavior change, even at a level as basic as shifting physical posture, can pose a challenge.

Bringing mindful awareness to the body can help clients, even those who are physically deconditioned, make their way from being sedentary to being active. This process can be facilitated by (1) *focusing* attention on present moment experience rather than future expectations; (2) *encouraging* slow movement as an interesting and valuable end in itself; (3) *developing* nonjudgmental awareness of sensations associated with physical exertion; and (4) *habituating*, over time, to sensations of exertion that accompany increasingly strenuous activity. As a clinician, you can help guide clients along the path of becoming accustomed to being physically active, particularly by emphasizing the first three steps in this process. Remember that mindfulness is not an end in itself, but rather a quality of awareness that contributes to skillfully navigating activities of daily life, including being physically active.

### **Mindfulness Practices for Developing Body Awareness**

There are many ways to develop mindful awareness of the body, both at rest and in motion, and I'd like to introduce some now, so you can start your own practice right away. (You may already have experimented with mindful walking, a practice introduced in Chapter 1.) This is very much in the spirit of the MBSR program, which incorporates awareness of the body in the very first session. There are four practices you can develop that will become easy for you to teach clients to do. They involve (1) awareness of the body while sitting still (Box 2.2 and Box 2.3); (2) awareness of the breath (Box 2.4); and (3) awareness of simple movement (Box 2.5). These practices build on one another, and therefore are of greatest benefit if approached sequentially. A description of each practice is followed by a brief exercise set off in a text box, then a summary of key aspects of it. Finally, I offer suggestions for refining your personal practice and teaching body awareness. As I mentioned earlier, direct personal experience and experimentation with specific practices is essential to effective teaching.<sup>1</sup> There are many movement-based methods to heighten body awareness, including the Alexander and Feldenkrais techniques, and more meditative practices like tai chi. All emphasize careful body alignment during movement, to which they attribute numerous health benefits. In contrast, movement practices have gained little traction in

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<sup>1</sup>As part of this preparation, particularly as your practice leads you into more varied forms of movement, you may find it helpful to consult with a qualified yoga teacher or other health specialist whose practice emphasizes body awareness. Keep in mind you are teaching clients awareness, not exercise.

clinical psychology, given our allegiance to psychotherapy as the “talking cure.” As mentioned in the introduction, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), a technique of alternately tensing and releasing muscles throughout the body to foster relaxation (McCallie, Blum, & Hood, 2006), is an exception. Developed by physician Edmund Jacobson to reduce stress in medical patients, PMR continues to be used in clinical practice. However, its emphasis is more on relaxation than body awareness, though it does involve attending to sensations of muscle contraction. In contrast, mindfulness of the body involves directing attention to different regions (not just muscles) and simply observing them with an attitude marked by nonstriving and openness.

One systematic way to practice mindfulness of the body is the *body scan*, a core component of the MBSR program described in detail elsewhere (Dreeben, Mamberg, & Salmon, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The body scan is traditionally done lying down on one’s back, which minimizes muscle tension and invites open awareness. You can also practice and teach the body scan while seated. Either way, doing the body scan creates a somatic landscape of inner sensations that are systematically explored over a sustained time period (45 minutes in MBSR), moving from one end of the body to the other. The body scan is described in greater detail in Chapter 3, which includes a narrative version for use in therapy (Box 3.1). Here, as an introductory practice, Box 2.2 offers a basic practice of directing attention inwardly. This brief narrative will help you get comfortable with the process and can also be used to prepare clients for longer versions. Practice before teaching it, until you can narrate it naturally without reading the script verbatim. A recorded version of this and the other practices included in the book is available at the book’s companion website (see the box at the end of the Table of Contents, as well as the List of Audio Files on pp. 277–278).

By convention, clients and therapists are normally seated, and this may be the best way to do these practices. On the other hand, doing the body scan while lying down on a mat or blanket promotes greater relaxed awareness because the weight of the body is fully supported. However, keep the following points in mind when determining how to position yourself and the client. First, many people can’t readily lie down on, or get up from, the floor. Second, having clients lie down while you remain seated can evoke anxiety and physical vulnerability. Third, office space limitations may make lying down impractical. For these reasons, I generally recommend staying seated. If you have one, a recliner may be a good compromise between having clients lie down and sit upright, provided they stay awake. Regardless, involving clients in the decision-making process is vital. Make sure they are well informed regarding what you are proposing to do and its underlying rationale.

**BOX 2.2. Directing Attention Inwardly**

Sit or lie down on a supportive surface, in a comfortable way that allows you to breathe easily. Rest your hands either in your lap or alongside the body. Allow the eyes to close, and let your attention settle inwardly, focusing on any of the various sensations associated with breathing that come into awareness, such as the belly rising and falling, or the flow of air through the nostrils. Just follow the breath as it brings life-giving oxygen into the body in an endless cycle. Allow time to become immersed in the experience of observing the breath, without attempting to change or modify it in any way. And now, as you are ready, redirect your attention away from the breath, letting it fade from awareness and bring awareness to the region of the shoulders, being open to whatever sensations come into awareness in the present moment as you sit or lie here. Slowly direct your attention from one shoulder to the other, and to the neck, and the back of the head, all regions of the body commonly associated with physical tension, which may or may not be present right now. If you are lying down, you may become aware of sensations where the head and shoulders contact the surface on which you are lying, absorbing the weight of this region of the body, reducing the need to engage muscles of the upper back and neck normally needed to sustain an upright posture. Be open to any sensations in this region, pleasant or unpleasant, that come into awareness as you sit or lie here and breathe, without trying to relax or attempt to alter the nature of this present-moment experience. After a few minutes of bringing attention to this region of the body, return your attention once again to the breath, and as you are comfortable doing so, slowly let the eyes open.

*Check-In:* What was it like to focus attention inwardly? Calming? Challenging? Intriguing? Could you feel any sensations involved in breathing? Were you able to redirect attention to the shoulders? If so, what did you notice? If you like, jot down a few notes about the experience that you may want to remember when teaching clients this simple practice.

**Key Aspects of Directing Attention Inwardly**

It's remarkable how little most of us know about the inner workings of our bodies, despite having lived in them for years. We treat them functionally, complain when they break down, and may even exercise to be healthy, but don't really learn much about them and what extraordinary capabilities they possess. While we can differentiate certain basic physical states such as hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, and arousal, beyond these our awareness

tends to be limited. Practices like the body scan increase acuity or sensitivity to inner states by enhancing focused attention in somewhat the same manner that increasing the magnification power of a microscope makes previously undetected objects visible.

Here are some of the many ways this simple introductory practice can be used clinically (Dreeben et al., 2013):

- Anchoring attention in present-moment experience: Whatever we notice taking place in the body occurs in “real time”
- Directly experiencing internal sensations associated with emotion labels such as *fear, anxiety, depression, stress, pleasure, and pain*
- Identify somatic aspects of cognitive processes like *thinking, remembering, and anticipating*
- Reducing overidentification with negative emotional states (“*I’m anxious*”; “*I’m depressed*”) by focusing more on accompanying sensations and describing them in simple, nonreactive terms (“*... feeling muscle tension . . . noticing shallow breathing*”)
- Appreciating the many ways the body continues to function despite the challenges to our health and well-being that occur throughout life
- Being aware of the defensive tendency to *avoid* encounters with unpleasant thoughts and feelings, and gently countering them by focusing on related physical sensations to establish a sort of experiential “beachhead” from which to initiate further therapeutic exploration

The next practice (Box 2.3) opens up awareness to the body as a whole, rather than isolating a specific region. This is a good practice for taking stock of the body’s contribution to how you are feeling at any point in time. Just sit, be still, and pay attention.

### **Key Aspects of Body Awareness While Lying Still**

The value of these initial practices comes from doing them regularly and with an attitude of openness and curiosity. They are a good prelude to a lengthier body scan because of their brevity. Turning attention inwardly, even for a few minutes, can be challenging, so be patient and persistent in developing this practice.

It’s one thing to tune in to the body when you feel comfortable. But what if you’re in pain? What possible benefit could there be in being open to something so aversive? This is a controversial aspect of mindfulness practice, because simply attending to pain, rather than trying to eradicate it, seems counterintuitive. However, early studies of mindfulness for

**BOX 2.3. Body Awareness Practice**

Sit in a chair so you can breathe comfortably, hands resting in your lap, and both feet on the floor. Initially, bring awareness to the points of contact between the body and the chair as you settle in, adjusting your position to maintain it without excess effort. This is a chair-based adaptation of *savasana*, the yoga “corpse pose,” the body in a state of relaxed stillness.

To begin, allow the eyes to close, and simply rest in a state of open awareness, receptive to whatever internal sensations come along. Notice any temptation to “do something” or “get somewhere” and just let it go because the intention of this practice is simply to be where you are.

Pay attention to whether your focus gravitates outwardly or inwardly. Resting in a peaceful and quiet setting encourages inward focus and lessens the need we often feel to be vigilant of our surroundings.

The intention of this practice is to encourage *awareness* of the body, not necessarily to relax. If you feel relaxed, that’s fine. But you may notice sensations linked to other states like tension or stress. If so, see if you can just acknowledge, in a nonjudgmental manner, whatever is present. You may find that letting go of wanting to change how things are has a calming effect. If not, there is nonetheless great value in learning to face your feelings in the moment openly and without self-reproach.

Now, gently narrow the focus of attention to the breath, to the movement of air entering and leaving the body. Stay with the breath as best you can, and when your mind wanders off just bring it back. Continue in this manner for a minute or two, then just let go of the breath and return to a state of open awareness. Gradually turn attention outwardly to your surroundings as you come to the end of this brief meditation.

**Check-In:** Did you stay awake? Were you aware of making contact with the chair? What was it like to rest in “open awareness” of the body?

chronic pain revealed three ways it can be helpful. First, when observed over time, pain often varies in intrusiveness. Second, physical sensations of pain may be less distressing than the *thoughts* and *emotional reactions* that accompany them, so decoupling them can reduce distress. Third, acknowledging pain can counteract the tendency to fight it, and instead invite a compassionate response, as noted by Sakyong Mipham: “Everybody suffers. When our own pain serves as a reminder of this truth, we can use it as a source of genuine compassion” (Mipham, 2012, p. 116).

Becoming attuned to the body in a restful, quiet state provides a foundation for subsequent development of awareness of movement. Whether

you have your client do this using the simple body-focused meditation, or more formally via the body scan, the overall intention is to practice focusing attention in the present moment.

## Practicing and Teaching Body Awareness

Developing somatic awareness requires practice, because normally the senses we rely on most—vision and hearing—focus *outwardly* and tend to dominate awareness. In contrast, turning inwardly reveals more subtle sensations from muscles, joints, and internal organs. (Pain, of course, is not so subtle and tends to override everything else.) Shifting awareness from external to internal modalities is a skill one develops over time. And as with most mindfulness practices, it helps to do this at a time and in a quiet place where you won't be distracted or interrupted.

Boxes 2.2 and 2.3 present brief body awareness exercises that can easily be learned and taught to clients. For a more extensive and structured practice, you may want to utilize the body scan found in Chapter 3 (Box 3.1) and available as a recording at the companion website or in the original form used in MBSR that is described in Chapter 3.

## Awareness of the Breath

It's common to begin meditation practice by using the breath as the focus of awareness. That's fine for general meditative purposes, but in the context of mindful movement I like to start with body awareness and *then* proceed to the breath. The reason is simple—once you've attained overall awareness of the body, you're in a better position to appreciate how much of it is involved in breathing. Teaching and practicing awareness of the breath brings to light sensations that are readily detectable both externally and from within. You can *see* the rising and falling of the belly and chest with each breath, but you can also *feel* the effects of this movement in this region of the body. We will explore the breath first, followed by other internal sensations generated by the body at rest, many of which are more subtle. Each domain—breath and body—is a fertile ground for learning to direct attention inwardly and sustain it in a nonjudgmental manner. Attending to the body at rest by tuning in to the various sensations it generates provides a foundation for learning to track voluntary movements associated with everyday actions such as walking, standing, sitting, reaching, and other functional movements. To practice and teach mindful movement, start with the body at rest, and bring attention to the experience of breathing. Box 2.4 is a brief narrative focusing on awareness of the breath.

### BOX 2.4. Awareness of the Breath

Be in a space that is comfortable, quiet, and free from distractions. Physical well-being is affected by qualities of the environment such as noise, temperature, and light, so be attentive to your surroundings and take time to establish a restful atmosphere.

Begin by sitting in a chair or other supportive surface in an upright way so you can breathe easily. Have the feet planted firmly on the floor, shoulders over the hips, head balanced on the neck. Chair seats often slope toward the rear, which encourages tilting the upper body forward and compressing the mid-section and abdomen. So sit upright, toward the front edge of the chair with the pelvis tilted slightly forward to open up space for the breath. If your feet don't touch the floor, place them on a block or similar object so you are firmly grounded. Rest the hands in your lap, or place them on the legs above the knees, whichever feels most supportive.

Pay attention to how it feels to sit in this deliberate way, which is very different from bending over a keyboard or lounging in an easy chair. This way of sitting evokes wakeful attentiveness not only by engaging muscles that keep the upper body in an upright posture, but also by conveying an attitude of deliberate intention: You are really *sitting*. Mindful awareness of the body—whether you are sitting, standing, or walking—embodies qualities of dignity and intentionality.

Once you have taken your seat, allow the eyes to close and direct attention to sensations associated with breathing, such as air moving in and out through the nostrils, or the belly rising and falling with each breath cycle. Experiment with tilting the pelvis forward and back, until you find a position that allows the belly to expand and contract freely as you breathe. When your mind wanders off, just notice this is happening and return attention to the breath. At first it may seem like this is all you are doing, but with persistence attention will gradually become more settled.

As attention stabilizes, awareness of certain qualities of the breath increases. Notice, for example, whether the breath is rapid or slow, regular or irregular, shallow or deep. Become aware of those moments between the in-breath and out-breath when breathing seems to cease momentarily before reflexively resuming. Approaching something so seemingly ordinary with curiosity and openness can yield rich dividends.

Continue following the breath as you sit, refocusing attention as needed when the mind wanders off, and when you are ready open the eyes gradually and sit quietly for a few moments.

**Check-In:** Reflect on the experience of focusing on the breath. Did you notice anything that perhaps you were not previously aware of? Approach this and every other mindfulness practice by being open to new discoveries about even commonplace experiences.

### **Key Aspects of Breath Awareness**

Clinically, you can teach the simple practice of breath awareness to help ground attention in the present. Postural stability that supports effective breathing has a positive effect on attitude, a word that in fact originally referred to physical alignment (Briñol, Petty, & Wagner, 2009). Breath awareness is a simple but effective way to practice mindfulness, because breathing takes place in real time, channeling attention into the present moment. And there are other insights to be gained from this practice, including the following:

- *Flexibility of attention*, which can be directed inwardly or outwardly. Though the world outside the body is especially alluring, we can turn inwardly and explore an equally tantalizing domain of experience.
- *Awareness of constant change*. Everything, including the breath, is constantly changing. One moment air is being drawn into the lungs, the next moment it's being released. Likewise, the heart continually contracts and relaxes, never taking a sustained rest throughout life.
- *Appreciating impermanence*—the fact that nothing endures forever, including breath and body. Just as things are always changing, everything eventually passes away, including the body, regardless of how well we care for it. Research clearly documents that exercise can extend longevity, improve physiological functioning, protect us from many chronic illnesses, and help maintain vital functional capabilities (Paffenbarger & Lee, 1996), but it doesn't do so indefinitely. As Carnes, Olshansky, and Grahn (2003) noted, we come with a warranty period of finite duration. Whereas the mind can wander from one thing to another, the body operates under physical constraints anchored in present-moment reality. A healthy approach to exercise is to find meaning and enjoyment in what you are capable of doing now, as opposed to striving for an idealized, future state of “fitness” and extended longevity. If it happens, great. If not, be grateful for what you can do *right now*.

### **Practicing and Teaching Awareness of the Breath**

Awareness of the breath touches on a core teaching of Buddhism, namely the constancy of change. What better opportunity to experience this firsthand than by following a few cycles of the breath? There's no need to dwell on this with clients at an early stage of mindfulness training, just be aware of how useful breath awareness can be to illustrate the dynamic

nature of somatic processes, which are always in a state of flux. Teaching should begin with observing sensations associated with the flow of air into and out of the body—nothing more—because it takes time to develop a capacity for sustained attention, despite the seemingly simple nature of the instruction. Box 2.4 is a kind of blueprint for practicing and teaching awareness of the breath in clinical settings. As I continually emphasize, start by establishing your own practice before teaching others. Proceed through each step slowly and with awareness, rather than in a rapid, perfunctory way. If you are tempted to skip over a specific step, or gloss over instructions because they seem self-evident, resist the temptation to do so. The process of building awareness is best done in an unhurried manner, so speak softly, move slowly, and linger over the narrative.

### **Using Simple Movements to Build Awareness**

The remainder of this chapter explores ways to move mindfully, with careful, moment-by-moment attention, instead of mindlessly going from one place to another, to purposefully improve your health. Having practiced both awareness of the body while sitting or lying still and awareness of the breath, you are now ready to explore the body in motion.

One cautionary note: There are many barriers to being active, including physical limitations, perceived lack of time, low self-efficacy, fear of injury, lack of access to exercise settings, self-esteem, and concerns with body image (Lox, Martin-Ginis, & Petruzzello, 2014). Either singly or collectively, these can be major roadblocks unless faced skillfully. The most important thing you can do in the face of obstacles like these is concentrate on what is happening, on what the obstacles actually are, what they feel like, what they consist of, and what you think about them. Some people feel as though their bodies have gradually broken down over the years. They dream about what they used to do years earlier and feel trapped in a body that no longer works like it used to. Others are derailed by sudden illness or injury that deprives them of capabilities they worked hard to develop. Still others face declining strength and endurance that come with advancing age. Regardless of the cause or course of physical decline, the sense of loss experienced when someone awakens to the reality of their present physical state can be distressing, yet at the same time can lead to an appreciation of what one is still capable of doing. Responding mindfully to challenges such as these is a matter of staying focused in the present, rather than ruminating about past or future concerns.

Working with a client's mindset about the feasibility and value of being physically active is vital. It's important to explore goals and expectations with clients openly and collaboratively, keeping attention focused

more in the present than on long-term aspirations. Unrealistically positive assessments about being active can be as problematic as those that are strongly negative, because they tend to cloud the clarity of present-moment acceptance. Keep in mind that physical activity rates in the general population are low, that few adults are active enough to derive even basic health-protective benefits, and that clients with psychological or physical burdens are especially challenged when it comes to initiating and sustaining any sort of systematic exercise program. Clinically, you'll be most likely to succeed with clients by encouraging present-moment awareness of the body, and not overemphasizing expectations of future benefits from physical activity.

Recall how the mindful walking exercise felt when you first tried it. Moving mindfully may seem a bit strange at first, because we're not used to paying much attention to movement *per se*, just as the breath is largely ignored unless we have problems breathing. Movement is ordinarily purposeful and goal-oriented. Physical movements like walking serve a transitional purpose, in that they transport us from one place to another, creating a change of scene. For many people, physical activity and exercise are also largely goal-oriented and transitional in nature, in that they serve the purpose of attaining strength, flexibility, and fitness.

Movements associated with goal-oriented behaviors are functionally associated more with the future than with present-moment reality, since they involve getting somewhere other than where we are right now. We can formulate and project into the future a mental map of where we are going (to lunch, to the car, to visit a friend) far in advance of the actual event, while the body remains anchored but unnoticed in the present moment. The exercise in Box 2.5 can help highlight this disconnect and guide us to return our focus to the present.

### **Key Aspects of Movement Awareness**

How does it feel to move? Do you ever pause and reflect on the capabilities that enable you to get from one place to another without much conscious control of the process, other than establishing an intention and setting the course? Consider walking, for example, the first mindfulness practice introduced in this book. It involves highly coordinated interplay among bones, joints, muscles, and connective tissues just to take a single step. Mindful walking provides an opportunity to become aware of these processes through moment-by-moment attention. Here's the basic sequence of movements, paraphrased from a highly detailed analysis of walking by evolutionary biologist Daniel Lieberman (2013).

To take a step, you swing one foot forward, pivoting from the hip, as the knee bends slightly to let the foot clear the ground. The other leg

**BOX 2.5. Awareness of Movement**

Be in a quiet place where you are free to move without interruption or being distracted. Start by sitting toward the forward edge of a chair without arms or on another supportive surface with hands on the knees, and feet firmly on the floor. Sit upright with your back straight and away from the chair, head balanced on the neck. The eyes may be open or closed, so long as you can maintain your balance. Either way, begin to connect with the physical sensations of just sitting here, bringing attention to sensations of pressure from the contact your body is making with the chair and floor. And now, as you sit here, begin to shift awareness to the nature and quality of the breath. Is it deep or shallow? Slow or rapid? Labored or easy? Notice as best you can how the experience of breathing is affected by how you are sitting. Sitting upright, with shoulders over the hips and arms supporting the upper body will create space for the breath. Now, lower the arms alongside your body so the fingers are pointed toward the floor, and pause in this position for one or two breathing cycles, allowing the breath to move into and out of the body in a relaxed manner. And now, beginning on an in-breath, slowly raise your right arm to the side, perhaps as high as shoulder level if you are able, focusing on whatever sensations accompany this movement. Pause at a comfortable height, take one or two more breaths, and then on an out-breath, slowly lower the arm until it rests at your side once again, without any sense of effort. Now, shift your attention to the left arm and lift it up to the side as you take a breath in. Raise the arm perhaps to shoulder level, letting attention settle on the accompanying sensations of engaging in this movement. Hold the arm in this position as you breathe once or twice, then slowly lower it back down to your side. You can repeat this sequence, alternately lifting and lowering each arm with focused awareness, then perhaps add a variation in which you raise both arms at the same time. When you have completed this practice and the arms are once again resting at your side, let the eyes open if they are closed, and sit quietly in a state of relaxed awareness for a few moments.

*Check-In:* What is it like to move with such deliberate awareness? Do you tend to take movement for granted, or can you see it as a rich experience for deep exploration?

remains straight, supporting the body's weight, while you do this. As you place the heel of the forward foot on the ground, the leg straightens, creating a strong, pole-like structure hinged at the ankle and supporting the body as it shifts forward. You now "vault" over the straight leg, bending the other knee and swinging the leg forward from the hip, until the foot eventually contacts the ground.

## Practicing and Teaching Awareness of Movement

Walking is just one of many simple movements that can be the focus of mindful awareness. You can create your own patterns by outlining a sequence of movements that you then perform slowly. Two yoga sequences in *Full Catastrophe Living* (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) are a good source of ideas, although many of the postures (asanas) are more involved than needed for the simple practice recommended here. Others are more straightforward, such as raising the arms alternately overhead to lengthen and stretch across the body. The key point is to work with simple movements that are easy to remember and practice. Box 2.5 is a good illustration of just how simple the movement can be. There is nothing especially physically challenging about the movements involved, and yet there is much to be learned. For example, you may discover that range of motion is greater in one arm than the other; or that it is challenging to keep the arms straight rather than bending them. You may notice a tendency to raise the arms slowly and lower them quickly, which is just the opposite of what you would do if this were a strength-training exercise. It may become evident that you are breathing in a way that's coordinated with the arm movement, such as inhaling as you lift the arms and exhaling as you lower them. Or perhaps you discover that you're holding your breath throughout the cycle. There is literally no end to the observations you can make as you sit and alternately lift one arm and then the other. The value in doing this exercise comes from *noticing* what you are doing as you do it, rather than just going through the motions. The following are some general principles that will help deepen the experience of moving mindfully:

- Coordinate movement and breathing. The breath is highly integrated with movement, yet many people find it challenging to connect the two. For example, anxious musicians often hold their breath rather than breathe with the music. They often find it helpful to practice yoga or tai chi, where breathing in rhythm with larger body movements is routinely practiced. Typically in yoga, movements that involve opening or expanding the body (standing, stretching, extending) generally start

while breathing in, whereas contracting the body (bending, compressing, twisting) starts on the out-breath.

- Move slowly and deliberately, utilizing the breath to help pace activity. This makes it easier to track movement on a moment-by-moment basis. The rhythmic nature of the breath is like an internal metronome that can speed up or slow down as needed, but that gravitates toward an intrinsic pace in the absence of conscious control. The effect is circular, in that as the breath slows and deepens, so does movement. And as we slow our movements, the breath slows, too, in part because of reduced metabolic demand, and also because of the calming effect of the parasympathetic nervous system at low rates of physical exertion.

- Slow, mindful movement is advantageous for other reasons as well. For example, when stretching or doing yoga slowly, risk of injury is reduced, in part because muscles are not being subjected to sudden (acute) strain, and also because you can more easily sense approaching physical limits, which if exceeded significantly increase the likelihood of strain or even injury. Furthermore, moving slowly enhances learning, as anyone who practices musical, athletic, and other skills with a significant motor component can attest. Slow movement helps bring physiological, musculoskeletal, and biomechanical elements under integrated control of the brain and nervous system, an essential aspect of learning. In strength training, this process is referred to as neuromuscular adaptation (Kramer, Fleck, & Evans, 1996).

- Individualize your practice and teaching. Mindful movement involves carefully observing one's capabilities and limitations. No two people will ever do a yoga pose the same way, nor do runners run the same way. Walking is individualized as well, as are virtually all other forms of movement. Physical stature, medical conditions, injuries, habitual activity level, balance, agility, and receptivity to learning are among the many factors that differentiate people when it comes to movement. In your own practice, and when teaching, keep this in mind as a means to reinforce awareness of how you and others respond to instructional guidance.

## Summary

As you read these pages, how aware are you of your body? When you walk down a grocery store aisle in search of an item, how aware are you of walking? Unless we make a conscious decision to direct attention in this way, body awareness tends to fade into the background of whatever we happen to be doing at a given moment. Few of us experience this sort

of moment-by-moment somatic awareness on a regular basis unless we're in pain. We're not especially attentive to inner states much of the time, whether moving around, sitting, or engaged in our characteristic busyness. Much of our attention is allocated to thinking and related cognitive processes that occupy most of our waking hours.

The importance of movement in mindfulness training can't be overstated. Chapter 3 describes mindfulness-based programs that utilize movement as a core component in addressing a wide range of clinical conditions. The first, MBSR, was developed for medical patients with chronic pain. This and the other programs all employ a group format, but there is no reason why the practices they employ cannot be implemented with individual clients.

### PAUSE AND REFLECT

What memories do you have of learning a form of movement that was new to you? Perhaps riding a bike? Learning to knit or to play an instrument? Maybe preparing food or learning to fish? Chances are you learned by *doing*, not reading about it. Hopefully someone guided you who already possessed the skill and knew the importance of patience and encouragement. When you teach mindfulness to others, let the foundation of your teaching be your own practice. If you want to teach mindful walking, prepare by walking mindfully and observing the experience. It's not about technical skill, or memorizing instructions, but rather drawing others in through your own embodied awareness.