

# A bit of biology

*“Thoughts are but dreams till their effects are tried”*

*William Shakespeare*

The study of the mind can help us a great deal in the development of self-awareness.

Largely thanks to advances in neuroscience in recent years, we know we do not have a mind designed for wellbeing. You have to “hack” it in order to work on it consciously. For example, we know that:

- Our mind is catastrophic. Negative things weigh 3-5 times more on the mind than positive things. In a survival scenario, the specimen that best detects a threat wins; not the one that is happiest. As the writer Michel de Montaigne said, “My life has been full of terrible misfortunes, most of which never happened.”
- All behaviour is driven by an emotion. Years ago, it was thought possible to separate rationality and emotionality. Today we know that this is not the case.

The following activity is aimed at balancing the negative bias of the mind:

**Keep a notebook and pen on your bedside table. Every night before you go to sleep, write down 3 good things that have happened to you during the day. They don't have to be big events: e.g., coming home to find your food cooked; having a nice chat with a colleague at work; being thanked by a customer. Write them down and explain how you enjoyed them.**

The following exercise, called Body Scan, is a Mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is a special way of paying attention to the present moment, to ourselves, to the tasks we are doing or to other people and the world around us. This particular practice is fundamental for developing emotional awareness.

The body is the "theatre of emotions". Emotions are psychophysiological phenomena which you have definitely noticed in yourself: when your face heats up, how your jaw tenses, the connecting area of your neck, shoulders and hands, when you get angry; or perhaps you have noticed in other people how their pupils dilate, how they avert their eyes, how their breathing alters, how their legs tremble when under the effects of fear.

Exercise makes it easier to reconnect with the body by constantly directing attention to it. Become aware that mind and body are two interconnected systems. It will take about 20 minutes to complete. If you notice your attention wavering during the exercise, don't worry, that's normal. Just be aware of it and bring it back as soon as possible; returning to observing your bodily sensations.

The Body Scan practice lets us become aware of tensions in the body that may go unnoticed during the demands of everyday life, observing them without trying to change anything, only realising that perhaps they are an emotional reflection. Regular practice increases our connection with physical needs, intuitions and bodily sensations.



**BodyScan guided audio meditation**

When immersed in the demands of everyday life, we pay little attention to the body. However, with practice, you can identify where emotions arise in the body, and stop them before they manage to "hijack" your mind and make you react automatically. Just by being able to identify the emotion lets you avoid immersing yourself in it and to stop most of its effects.

Thus, for example, it will not stop us from falling into the trap of that set of physiological responses, which were highly effective in a prehistoric world where we had to respond quickly to the danger of being eaten by a bear. Now, however, these are absolutely limiting when triggered by an argument with a co-worker.

This practice will also help you sleep better!