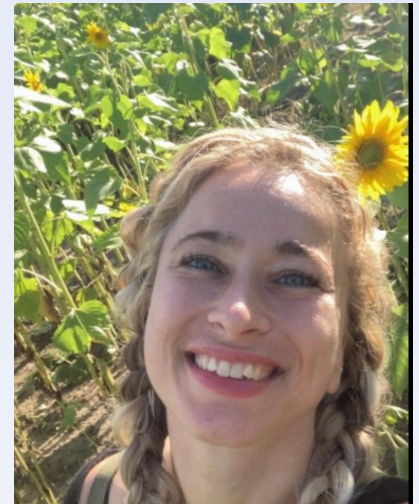


We would like to introduce Shannon Freedom, a new member of the Board of Directors of the Microscopic Colitis Foundation. She will be contributing to the monthly newsletters about her favorite topic, stress reduction and mindfulness.

Shannon has a Doctorate in Physical Therapy from the University of Indianapolis, and works as a physical therapist in a hospital setting. This has allowed her to see the powerful effects of the mind on physical health. And as person with microscopic colitis, she has put into practice what she has learned, developing valuable insights into the helpful role of stress reduction in dealing with this disease. She would like to share her on-going efforts to incorporate stress reduction into her daily routine, starting with this newsletter overview.



On a personal level, she is a talented soccer player, having played at the college level for the University of Illinois, Springfield. She currently is the captain of 2 co-ed soccer teams. She loves cats, Taylor Swift, health podcasts by Andrew Huberman, and red-light therapy. She enjoys meditations that provide a clear mind to make the best decisions for her life.



# A Key to Healing May Already Be Within You: Mindfulness and Microscopic Colitis

by Shannon Freedom

## Objectives:

1. Share a personal remission story to reinforce that healing is possible.
2. Demonstrate that stress and mindfulness play a central role in gut health.
3. Show the importance of body awareness
  - Rushing/body tension is draining
  - Move soft and slow for sustainable energy
  - Naturally stay tuned-in to the sensations of the body
4. Practice body scanning
  - Waiting in line
  - During stopped traffic
  - Focus on breathing
  - Sensations while eating

## My Story

This may sound relatable: complete exhaustion, food intolerances, muscle aches, multiple headaches a day, generally cold and irritated. Telling myself “Just push through this one last task”, but somehow that last task never ended. No matter how fast I moved, I could never get enough done. Doctors scratched their heads and provided symptom masking drugs.

*Now looking back, my body was crying for help in many noticeable ways, and I couldn't even hear it.*

If you're anything like me, you might appreciate this reminder: **Find a comfortable position to relax and read this article. If you tend to fall asleep while leaning back, sit upright to allow improved alertness.**

## Budesonide

Diagnosed with microscopic colitis in November 2024, I was educated on a simple treatment plan of one small pill a day (budesonide). Budesonide dramatically increased my levels of anxiety, and sleeping felt impossible. The pill may have allowed room for healing by reducing some inflammation, however, it seemed to primarily mask the symptoms. Why was the inflammation forming to begin with?

## Diet

I continued down my health journey, trying new diets (low FODMAP, the Lion Diet, AIP). I found some success with the carnivore diet by Mikhaila Peterson. My meals still remain mostly meat. However, the elimination diet from "The Microscopic Colitis Diet Book" by Wayne Persky<sup>12</sup> held strong for me. Each time I tried testing the book's logic, the book was sound. I now felt that my diet had been resolved enough to begin healing. I was feeling a bit better.

### 4 Main Pillars of Health<sup>1</sup>

#### Diet, exercise, sleep, mental/behavioral

Due to recurring flare ups, I noticed diet was only one piece of the puzzle, followed by exercise, sleep and mental/behavioral. I'd regularly exercise and maintained good sleep hygiene. Nevertheless I noticed that any strategy was failing at times of stress (falling under mental/behavioral).

### Stress Causes Inflammation

Then I began to see the big picture: stress causes inflammation, and inflammation damages the most vulnerable organ(s).<sup>2</sup> For me this was my gut. I felt I had finally uncovered a major source of my inflammation. I didn't realize how stressed I truly was because it felt normal to me. I hadn't understood that resisting the present moment (or rushing through tasks) was itself a form of stress. "The Power of Now" revealed how peaceful I could feel by practicing mindfulness techniques such as improving body awareness.<sup>3</sup> I couldn't think of any (healthy) stress relief method that was better.

**Take a moment to check in with your body. Perform a scan for any tension, checking from head to toe.**

**Head. Shoulders. Belly. Hips. Thighs. Feet.**

### Body Awareness

#### Stay Tuned In to the Body: Moving Soft and Slow

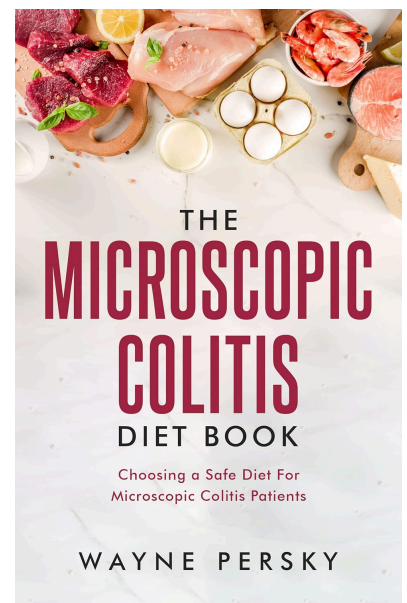
Unconsciously rushing through everyday tasks left me exhausted. Once worn out, I felt I needed to rest before doing tasks such as chores, but the rest never felt restorative, and the chores stayed unfinished. Even while reading, my attention was on how much longer it would take to finish rather than on the words themselves. I kept wondering: why am I always rushing?



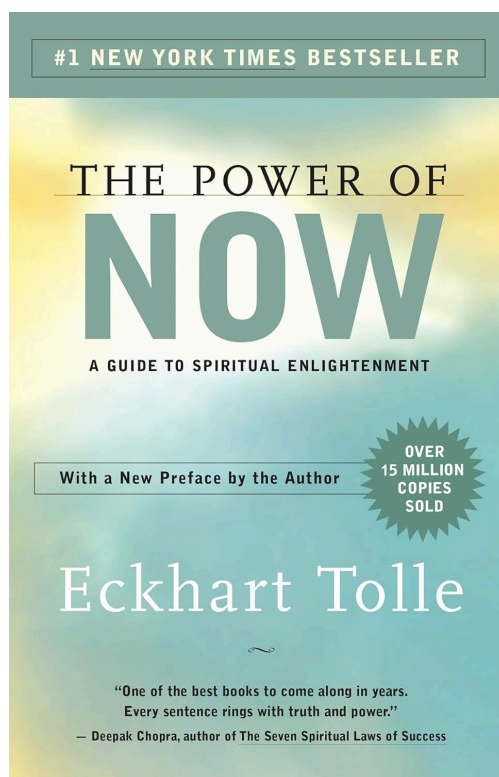
I now understand that a slower pace is far more sustainable. Moving more slowly allows me to stay tuned in to my body's sensations and notice when tension and urgency creep in. When the body slows down, the mind follows, and relaxation naturally arises.

Now I do household chores soft and slow, and the chore itself becomes the rest. I feel my body relax and rejuvenate as I move. Cueing myself to slow down doesn't turn me into a turtle; it brings me into a steady, sustainable rhythm that gently counteracts my tendency to rush.

I try to carry this approach throughout the day: walking softly and slowly, pushing off my heels, letting my arms swing freely, and softening my speaking, breathing, and even my thinking. Any day I stay committed to moving soft and slow feels peaceful and deeply nourishing. I look forward to many more days like this.



Take a second to notice how your body feels. Check for any tension, especially in the shoulder area and the thighs. Just notice.



## Body Scanning

If there is one takeaway I hope readers gain from this article, it's the powerful impact of staying in tune with the body. Taking a moment to scan the body is known as body scanning. I've been practicing this by regularly noticing how my body feels throughout the day and during specific activities.<sup>3</sup>

According to "The Power of Now", the goal is to develop such a strong connection with the body, that even subtle shifts in energy or mood are noticed, naturally. The key is to remain tuned-in on bodily sensations in the background of the mind.

Body scanning can shine light on body areas where tender loving care is needed, so the body can relax. The key is noticing, without attempting to change. Once attention is on the tense muscles, the tensing feels too exhausting to keep up, and the body can naturally soften.<sup>3</sup>

## Try a Full Body Scan for Yourself

You might want to try it out for yourself. Below are 2 easy steps to begin body scanning.

1. Take a couple seconds to take some deep breaths. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth as the belly moves up and down for 2 repetitions. Keep special attention on inflating your belly.
2. Start at the top of your body. Begin with the head, noticing any tension, feelings of pressure, or fullness. Monitor with no resistance to what is. Just noticing..... Then get a feel for how the shoulders are holding up. Checking for stiffness or tension..... Then the abdomen. Checking for any pressure or tension.... Next the legs... feeling for any discomfort. Lastly, the toes. Just noticing, without resistance.<sup>3</sup>

## Warm Feeling

Each time I've remembered to monitor how my body feels, I've felt this warm, loving, comforting feeling inside. The warm feeling seems to get stronger as I continue to check in with my body, and pamper myself

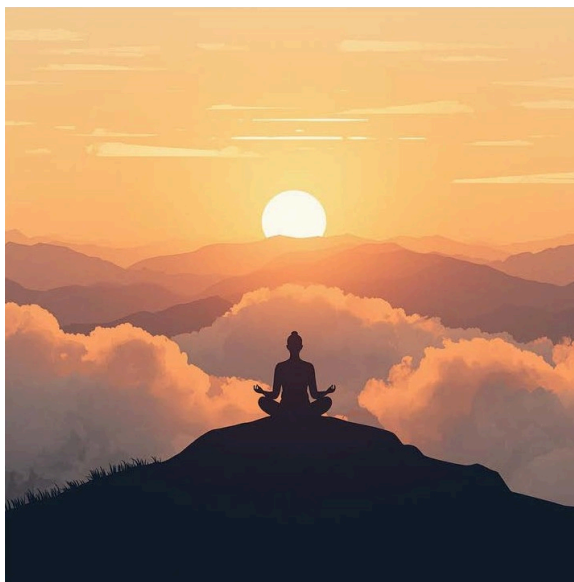
based on what I feel my body needs. I think this warm, loving feeling is called self love.

A great time to practice body scanning is while waiting in line or during stopped traffic. During times of greater overstimulation, solely focusing on the belly rising and falling is often the easiest method to regain a state of calm.<sup>3</sup>

### **Body Scans During Meals**

Pay close attention to the body during meals. My dietician told me that any messages from the gut indicate struggling. This includes noises (gurgling, rumbling), feelings of excess pressure (bloating), etc. A healthy gut has no signaling.<sup>10</sup>

After each meal I ask myself “How do I feel at this moment?” to see how the food has affected me. I’ve noticed sugar and carbs make me more tense, stressed, and anxious.



### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness has been the single most transformative practice for my health. When I consciously reduce stress through mindfulness, all 4 pillars seem to strengthen together.<sup>4</sup> When I am mindful, I find:

1. I experience fewer digestive symptoms.<sup>5</sup>
2. I feel more rested with the same amount of sleep.<sup>6</sup>
3. I fall asleep faster and rest more deeply.<sup>7</sup>
4. I experience greater clarity and awareness of thoughts.<sup>8</sup>
5. Less pain (body scanning painful areas can dissolve the pain<sup>9</sup>).

### **Remission is Possible**

Now successfully in remission, I’ve been able to dabble outside of my safe foods, and add a small amount of foods that used to be entirely intolerable. I know it can sometimes take 3 years for the gut to fully heal.<sup>11</sup>

I hope to be an example that remission is possible, but it requires change.

**“If you don’t like the road you’re walking on, pave another one.”** - Dolly Parton.

Focus your energy not on fighting the old path, but paving the new one. If mindfulness is the path you decide to take, I just want to say, "I believe in you". 😊.

**Take a few seconds to pay attention to your breathing. In through the nose and out through the mouth. Feel the belly rise and fall each breath. You might want to hold a hand on the belly to**

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## Check Out Wayne's Blog

He posts a new blog about once a week. Here are the titles of the most recent. Click the button at the top of the newsletter to access.

### Alpha-Gal Syndrome

**Why Aren't Medical Guidelines on Vitamin D Designed to Prevent Most Diseases?**

**New Discovery Reduces Chronic Inflammation — Will It Help MC Patients?**

**Why the Big Shift from MD to DO Graduates—and What It Means for Us**

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