

What's Happening in My Body?

*“The felt sense is a medium through which we experience the fullness of sensations and knowledge of ourselves.” ~Peter Levine, from *Waking the Tiger**

Below is a guide to increase your somatic (body) awareness and intelligence and to help you better listen to all the ways your body communicates with you.

A basic mantra to adopt when it comes to increasing your somatic intelligence is:

SENSE MORE, THINK LESS

In order to sense more, this also means you must SLOW DOWN and practice sending your attention into the body to listen with care and curiosity.

As you learn to listen or **attune to your body** you will:

- Become a maven at self-care
- Come into a deeper knowing, understanding and love for yourself
- Become more aware of and responsive to your needs and desires
- Improve your ability to set healthy boundaries
- Feel more grounded
- Increase your resilience during stressful events
- Have greater access to pleasure, joy and ease

Since the **body can only live in present time**, as you learn to observe and name what's happening in your body, you arrive fully in the now.

The 5 Senses: Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight and Sound

An easy entry into your body's wisdom begins with the five senses.

Did you know that **touch** is the very first sense we develop? As little babies in utero, we are bathed in our mother's amniotic fluid which is the environment that nourishes and sustains us until birth. Consider some of these questions related to the sense of touch:

- *Do you get enough, healthy, loving and safe touch every day?*
- *What tells you when the touch you are receiving is “just right?”*
- *What sensations describe the kind of touch you enjoy?*
- *How do you like to be held or touched?*

Other 5 senses questions:

- *What sense is most alive for you? Does this change depending on the environment?*
- *What are you touching, seeing, smelling, tasting or hearing right now?*
- *Describe what you are: Hearing (silence, rustling, loud...)*
 - *Seeing (is your vision clear and sharp? Hazy? Tunnel vision? Spotty?)*
 - *Smelling (sweet, rotting, pungent, harsh...)*
 - *Touching (hard, furry, gritty, heavy, smooth...)*
 - *Tasting (sweet, chalky, savory, burnt...)*

Breath

Often, the quality of our breathing speaks to our stress and emotional states. Noticing breath is a foundation practice of mindful attention and somatic awareness. Questions about our breathing:

- *Can you describe the quality of your breathing? Some words to describe your breath: fast, deep, slow, steady, pressured, shallow, constricted*
- *What parts of your body move when you breathe? Chest? Shoulders? Belly?*
- *How do changes in posture affect your breathing?*

Physiological Cues

Physiological cues can give us information about which branch of the nervous system, the sympathetic or the parasympathetic branch, is operating.

The **Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)** governs fight, flight and taking action. It's like the accelerator in the nervous system and uses cortisol and adrenaline to rev us up.

- *Words to describe SNS functioning include: arousal, activation, excitation, and stress*

The **Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)** governs rest and digest/feed and breed functions. The PNS puts the breaks on the SNS and helps us to slow down and settle.

- *Words to describe PNS functioning include: settling, deactivation, relaxation, and slowing down.*

Many of the physiological cues listed below can be described as “*auto-regulated*,” meaning that the body is wired to take care of these things for you so that you don't have to manage them.

Here are physiological cues to notice:

- Appetite: *What are you craving? What tells you when you're hungry? Do you know when you are full?*
- Body temperature: *Just right? Chills? Hot flashes?*
- Bowel movements: *How often are you peeing? What's the quality of your pee? Are you pooping regularly? What's the quality of your poo?*
- Digestion: *Bloated? Gassy? Can you feel your belly digesting after you've eaten?*
- Heart rate: *Pounding? Smooth? Even? Calm? Can you feel your heart beating?*
- Moisture level of your eyes: *Wet? Tearful? Dry?*
- Respiration: *rate, quality of your breath?*
- Skin: *Clammy? Sweaty? Dry? Moist? Itchy?*

Sensation!

The ability to observe and name sensations is an essential skill to increasing your somatic awareness and intelligence; it's called **interoception**. Being able to identify sensations in the body gives us important information that allows us to respond to our needs more quickly, effectively and meaningfully. Below is a beginning list of sensations and questions to consider:

1. Air current: *Can you feel air on your skin? Describe what it feels like.*
 - Sensation words: *gentle, warm, soft, rushing, cool, crisp, still*
2. Density: *Is the sensation, light, heavy or someplace in between?*

- Sensation words: *soft, hard, squishy, fluid, packed*
- 3. **Color:** *Does the sensation have a color or hue? Is the color opaque, transparent, solid?*
- 4. **Movement/Energy:** *How does the sensation move? Pulsing? Erratic? Wavy? Jagged? Is there a speed to the sensation: Fast? Slow? Still?*
- 5. **Form/shape:** *What form or shape does the sensation assume? Flat? Circular? Blobby?*
- 6. **Nothingness/ absence of sensation:** *Numb? Blank? Empty?*
- 7. **Pain:** *Where does it hurt? What would help alleviate the pain?*
 - Sensation words: *stinging, tender, throbbing, irritated, stiff, itchy, inflamed, dull*
- 8. **Pressure:** *Where do you notice pressure? Does the pressure move in a certain direction?*
 - Sensation words: *intense, light, wavy, throbbing, painful*
- 9. **Tension:** *Where? How intense on a scale of 1-10?*
- 10. **Tingling:** *Where do you notice tingling in your body? Is it warm? Like pins and needles? How does it move or travel in your body?*
 - Sensation words: *Prickly, tingly, vibrating, wave-like, warm, cool, painful*

Posture of Face and Body

Our facial expressions and body posture often communicate much more than we realize. Our postures communicate what's happening on our insides, like our emotions and sense of self. Here are some questions to help you notice what your face and body are doing:

- *Is your body stance more open or more closed? What tells you that?*
- *Is your eye contact a hard stare? A soft gaze? Are you avoiding eye contact?*
- *Is your jaw clenched, soft or just right?*
- *How does your face feel: Soft Tight? Do you know what your facial expression conveys?*
- *What are your shoulders doing? Up by your ears or easily resting down?*
- *How does your neck feel? What's your neck doing?*
- *How do your spine and back feel? Slumped? Rigid? Sore? Tight? Fluid?*

Brace Patterns

A brace pattern is a habitual way that you hold your body in any given situation such that your muscles are engaged or contracted for a prolonged state. When we are able to identify how our body might be bracing, that awareness gives us the power to do something different, especially when we can recognize that our brace pattern is painful and/or uncomfortable.

- Examples of brace patterns include:
 - *Shrugging your shoulders up by your ears*
 - *Clenching your jaw*
 - *Sucking in your stomach*
 - *Curling your toes*
 - *“Hard gazing” with your eyes such that your muscles around your eyes feel tense*

Location

- *Where do you notice feeling neutral, solid or alive and well? Where feels good right now?*
- *Where do you notice your body trying to get your attention?*
- *Where does the sensation begin and end in your body?*

Impulse

Coming into awareness of what our body WANTS TO DO, or noticing impulses, brings us into the power of choice. When we react without awareness, this can lead to acting out of integrity and/or engaging in self-destructive behaviors. Here are some questions to consider:

- *What wants to happen right now?*
- *How does my body want to express itself through movement or action?*
- *What happens if I sit with an impulse without acting on it?*
- *What might these impulses be telling me about what's happening right now?*

Emotions

One of the ways that I think about e-motions is ***energy in motion***. What's true is that all emotions have a corresponding motor program that goes with it, meaning an action or gesture to express that energy in motion. When exploring your emotions, here are some questions to consider:

- *Where in your body do you feel the emotion?*
- *What sensations come along with the emotion? Warmth? Tingling? Softness?*
- *What impulses are present with the emotion?*
- *What's your body doing when the emotion is present? Crying? Constricting? Eyes widening? Jaw clenching?*
- *Which emotions give you more energy? Which ones feel draining or tiring?*

Movement and Energy

- *How does your body feel overall when you are in motion?*
- *What kinds of movement does your body enjoy doing? Dance? Running? Yoga?*
- *What is your body doing right now?*
- *How is your energy level right now? Up? Low? Just right? Crashing?*

As you can see, the language of the body is wide, varied, nuanced and rich!

The better you get at listening to your body, the more resilient you will become.

References:

1. *In An Unspoken Voice* by Peter Levine
2. *Mindsight* by Daniel Siegel
3. www.new-synapse.com by Heidi Hanson