

The path to a positive Body Image

Workbook

“Do something every day that is loving toward your body and gives you the opportunity to enjoy the sensations of your body.” Golda Poretsky

Nude-Thinking Counseling

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workbook



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Hello body!

Body image is very connected to our thoughts and feelings about this vessel.

Hence the emphasis on those so far. Another way to start appreciating our bodies more is by paying closer attention to it and how we function in it. The more familiar you are with your relation to it, the quicker you will catch yourself in ignoring its signs.

Signals

It is bloody awesome how smart the body is. Since it has to deal with your biological functions, thoughts, emotions, environment, interactions, energetic influences, and external stimuli. I mean, this is a busy factory! It must fill you with awe when you stop to really think about this.

Like all production lines, what you put in directly influences the outcome. In the body this not only shows up as excretions, but also as pains, aches, muscle spasm, ticks, smells, and so forth. And I am probably going to gross you out a little here, but how much attention do you pay to these signals? When did you last study your stool? And do you know the 'normal' smell of your gas? What colour is your pee? Do you have funky spunk? Are you familiar with your menstrual cycle? Where do you sweat from and how much? I am talking about the basics here. Knowing them, knowing your base line and familiarising yourself with it, will lessen your judgement of it. This is your 'normal'.

Exercise 8

You knew this was coming.... over the next week (month if you also need to find out about your cycle) you are going to pay attention to these things and find a personal norm. Hell, why not compare with your housemates! Don't be embarrassed, this is nature doing what it needs to do.

But it gets a little more complicated when we want to decipher the other signals our body is sending out. Yes there are the obvious ones like colds and other minor diseases. The immune system telling you that it is overloaded.

Fatigue starts getting a little more vague, since it could have so many causes and the level of fatigue can differ greatly.

Muscle pains (the back is a classic one) are often accepted as a result of doing something silly or just a weak spot.

Ticks, I have a tell-sign for stress when a small muscle in my eye starts twitching, are very often judged harshly as annoying and ugly.

Meanwhile your body is telling you that the factory needs maintenance, it needs a different input, a shift. And your mind will try and ignore this task and dismiss the body as weak, insignificant, as you are still able to function generally.

Hello body!

It is therefore a two edged sword. Your thoughts about your body can make it function sub-optimal or exterior influences will and your thoughts about this happening then create a vicious cycle.

So what do you do? Duh, pay attention off course! Yes true, but it is a skill you must develop over time. Have some patience with yourself. And keep reminding yourself that you are going to listen when you notice your body giving out a signal. Here is one way to train yourself in listening to your body: the body scan.

Exercise 9 The Body Scan (video)

Pick a moment (5 minutes will do, longer is more relaxed) when you won't be disturbed. I find that lying down is best, but sitting on a chair is also an option. When sitting, make sure your back is supported and straight, both feet are on the ground, your hands are resting in your lap and that your clothes aren't pinching. If you choose to lie down a yoga mat is best as it allows you to feel more than on the bed. Make sure you are warm, cover yourself with a blanket or turn up the heating. Soften the lights, even if you close your eyes.

What the scan will do, is take your awareness through your entire body. Becoming aware of it, releasing tension, being inquisitive rather than judgemental. Everything is information, nothing more or less.

Instead of writing out the body scan, let me point out a few guided ones readily available on youtube. There are plenty more. Each differs in time and a little in style. But it is a very personal preference which voice suits you.

You can also find a body scan in your package, where I shall guide you through the body. But I encourage you to try some others as well. Only you can decide which works best for you.

Now lie back and breathe....

Youtube body scan examples:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6W31vHDjyng>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obYJRmgrqOU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cstdBKVZ6B4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7xGF8F28zo>

Hello body!

Needs

The body has very obvious needs like nourishment, care, contact, exercise, sleep, relaxation and excitement.

Oh, not so obvious to you? Well lets have a look at the list one by one.

Yes, nourishment is the most obvious. Without food and drink we die. Very simple rule. But in this world of abundance and mass production even this has become a complicated subject. Most of us are aware that sugar and fat are bad. Nah, not even this is true. Fruit has natural sugars that your body is able to process. And nuts, avocado, fatty fish are natural sources of fats that are actually beneficial to the body rather than harmful.

There are many schools of thought on this subject and I can wholeheartedly encourage you to inform yourself. But something everyone seems to agree on is that prefab is bad. Going fresh and from scratch leaves you in control of the ingredients and their quality. Organic, vegan, no carbs, supplements, are all a matter of choice to me. Make up your own mind, you will hear no dogma's from me. I only encourage you to be aware of the effect that food has on your body (are you getting bloated, sleepy, hyper after eating? These are signs your body might be struggling with some of your food habits). I also find that the seasons effect what my body requires, as does my menstrual cycle and my level of activity. Remember to be alert if the body or the mind is requiring nourishment. Stress eating is mental for instance.

Then there is fluids. What should you drink. Oh dear, another debate with many opinions. Can we at least agree that soft drinks (incl light versions), coffee/black tea and sugary juices are not the optimal nourishment for the body? I love a coke, don't get me wrong, but I know I am drinking it for joy not to feed the body. Alcohol is also questionable, but then wine has also been shown to have some benefits. Lordilord.

So lets talk about the need for hydration then. The body is largely made up of water. Our brains are 76% water, the lungs 90% and our blood 84%. Astounding. We need water to carry nutrients through the body, to help maintain our temperature, it helps us grow and heal. Case made for drinking water. How much is again a matter of opinion. I feel good with drinking 2,5l a day at least and eating plenty of water-rich foods. But that's my body. Find out what your body requires.

The body needs care. It needs maintenance like any machine would do. Teeth, eyes, nails, skin need regular attention. But also think about what your body needs in terms of internal care. How is your flexibility? Pinched nerves, tight muscles? Alignment issues? They drain the body of its energy and limit you in functioning at optimum level. And yes.. can you feel the judgement happening? 'My body is weak!', 'I am accident prone', limiting core believes.

Find experts to help you. Take a yoga class, see a physiotherapist or osteopath, they really will benefit you and no, they are not the same as doing sports.

Hello body!

But care also includes feeding your desires, whatever they may be, and meditation. Caring for your mind by teaching it to focus and be calm (meditation) has scientifically been proven to be of great benefit to your mental and physical health. And desire? If you are in constant craving, starved for that which you deny yourself, then you are not taking care of a need your body is clearly communicating. If you judge this desire to be bad for you, that won't make it go away. If you indulge and it damages you in some way, then it might be an addiction rather than a desire. Knowing our desire is something we have unlearned. Often what we believe to be our desire is externally motivated, so doing some soul searching on this can only be encouraged.

Another need of the body is physical contact. Research has shown that babies who are not touched actually die. Seriously. Being touched is beneficial to your health, physically and mentally. Physically it releases stress relieving hormones and increases blood flow. Science has shown diminished chance for developing Alzheimer when older people are touched regularly, it has been proven to ease skin diseases like psoriasis, lower blood pressure, strengthen the immune system, and there are even indications that it may lower the chance of heart disease. Mentally it has the effect to make you feel 'seen', grounded and welcome in this world. It also lowers aggressive tendencies. It establishes trust and non-sexual intimacy. Pretty powerful stuff.

A pretty obvious one too is the need to exercise. To keep the body and the mind engaged and active. Now do not assume that exercise means you have to be a top athlete. It means that the body requires regular movement and exertion at times to not only drain excess energy, but also keep the heart healthy. It is like oiling the machine regularly to keep it going.

Many people in the world are sleep deprived. It is true that many of us have different sleeping needs, but it is advised to have at least 4 hours and 7/8 hours optimally. Your system needs time to reset. When you are ill or have wounds it is during sleep that your body will do its best healing. REM sleep is the most talked about as this is where we dream and which, when missed out on, directly affects our capacity to do complex tasks.

Let's look at sleep a bit more closely*:

REM sleep occurs in cycles of about 90-120 minutes throughout the night, and it accounts for up to 20-25% of total sleep time in adult humans, although the proportion decreases with age (a newborn baby may spend 80% of total sleep time in the REM stage). In particular, REM sleep dominates the latter half of the sleep period, especially the hours before waking, and the REM component of each sleep cycle typically increases as the night goes on.

Hello body!

Generally speaking, the deeper the level of sleep, the slower, stronger and more synchronized the brain waves become, so that a sleep cycle can also be thought of as a progression from the beta and gamma waves of wakefulness, through alpha and theta waves, to the delta waves of slow-wave sleep (and back again). Also, the deeper the level of sleep in the cycle, the higher the arousal threshold, so that it is quite difficult to wake someone in stage 3 sleep, but relatively easy in stage 1 or REM sleep. There is also a general tendency towards decreased muscle tone as deeper and deeper sleep stages are achieved, although in this case REM sleep is the exception in that muscle tone is at its lowest during that stage (despite its relatively high brain wave activity and low arousal threshold).

Each sleep stage in any particular sleep cycle fulfills a distinct physiological and neurological function, each of which appears to be necessary for the health of the body and mind, to the extent that, if sleep is interrupted or if certain stages are missing for any reason, their physiological functions are not fully executed, and the person may feel tired or groggy even after an apparently sufficient sleep period, a phenomenon known as "sleep inertia".

*source: howsleepworks.com

Sleep and relaxation are often linked as the latter can affect your ability to do the first. Relaxation is also needed during the day to allow your hormones to stay balanced, to decrease muscle tension and facilitate deeper breathing which is the motor to your whole body doing what it needs to do. Even the heart is useless without oxygen.

I am not advocating that you need to be in a constant chill mode. That could even turn into complete lethargy. Relaxation is allowing your body to carry you through whatever you are doing. Deep concentration, high performance, quick responsiveness are supported by a body that is without constraint. It may be in peek state, but not in hyper tense mode. Try it. Start by breathing properly (deep nose breathing starting from deep in the belly and up into the chest, then empty the belly first followed by the chest. A wave. Slow it down. Take longer on the out breath) and shake your body loose to release muscle tension and get the energy circulating.

Let me end with excitement. I am talking arousal. This is tantric stuff. We often seek sources of energy outside ourselves to replenish, but the reality of our fabulous bodies is: we have a build in source of energy that is constantly producing. Our genitals are generally not welcome outside the privacy of the bedroom. But they are not detachable, or do you leave yours at home in the cupboard? So let them serve another purpose. As you feel arousal throughout the day, and we know you will from time to time, acknowledge it. Feel the energy build up and breathe! Feel that sexy energy course through your body. It makes you feel alive. Turned on. No no not horny, but switched on.

Hello body!

As you practice using this energy as a source you will also find that it heightens your senses to more arousal. Getting the juices flowing will have a whole new meaning as it is not preparing you for sex, but for any kind of performance, activity. Connecting with this taboo area may be a little embarrassing at first, I understand, but can you imagine how much fun you will have knowing how useful your arousal can become? I could talk about this for ever, but will leave you to digest this and perhaps even have a go? Go on, you know you want to!

Emotion in the body

When you drew your body in exercise 4 you already looked at some of the emotions you keep in your body and where they are housed. We humans thrive on emotions. We even claim it is what makes us different from other animals (not sure as we can't really ask our cat how it feels). Let's assume that you have a great need to feel. That feeling is what makes you connected to life and everyone in it. In that case it is important to recognise the need for this emotion, or recognise when the body is telling us that we are not allowing that emotion to flow freely. Let me give you an example. If desire lives in your belly and you are having regular belly aches or lack of bowel movement, it might be interesting to stop and listen to the belly. Have a conversation with it, as it were. Is the discomfort connected to your desire? What is the desire? And is this desire allowed to be spoken, felt, lived?

This practice is more of a meditation than an actual conversation. It is about getting still, placing your hands on the body part you want to connect with, and breathing. As you focus in a relaxed manner, thoughts, pictures, colours, perhaps even sounds will come up. You could use the body scan here too if you like that.

It may also be that you are not completely sure which feelings live where, but you do get protective or emotional when touched in certain places, there may be parts of your body you are struggling to connect with, others may be overly sensitive. All worthy of some attention and body-talk. Become your own guru. Discover the hidden secrets of your body's layers. And as you get to know your emotional hotspots in your body, get playful in finding ways to allow these emotional highways in your system to flow and be accessible to you. Mastering this can help you feel more balanced and in control of your emotions as well as make you more confident about yourself.

PS Some of this work can be difficult and emotional. Change your state when you feel it is needed by shaking that ass!

Hello body!

Energy

We have touched on energy a few times now and you have learned several causes that can influence your level of vitality. You don't need me to tell you that feeling energetic, vibrant, alive is awesome. You probably know what you could be changing in your lifestyle in order to improve in this area (and if you don't, go see a specialist in vitality, really useful). Much of what this program has already been doing is inviting you to change your mental state through awareness and understanding. The purpose of doing this is to support change and open your mind to a new perspective.

All of that is easily said. We have all been in situation where we wanted to change, perhaps we even did for a while, but ultimately you revert to the old way of thinking and feeling.

So what is needed? You need to dig deep to find your 'why'. Without a convincing reason to motivate sustained change it becomes something you realise on mere willpower. And that fades in time, you will refocus your willpower. Like New Years resolutions. It seems like such a good plan in January, and then life happens and all is forgotten.

Coming to the point where you believe the following is where change can really take root: it must change now.... I must change it now.... I can change it now.

Too often we need to be shocked into change. Someone gets cancer and you finally stop smoking, your child nearly drowns and you finally take swimming lessons, you fall asleep behind the wheel of your car for 2 seconds it finally dawns on you that you need more sleep. Horrific experiences. And completely bizar that we would need these extremes to evoke action. But what is the lesson to be learned from these examples? That the change must be realised right now in order not to lose any more time over it. For life is happening right now and you want to be experiencing it full on.

Finding your compelling reason for change, your 'why' and then coming to the believe that this is a change that **MUST** be realised **NOW** is what I encourage you to do.

Exercise 10 Finding your "why" (video instruction)

Please sit down, close your eyes and listen to the video.
Make sure you will not be disturbed or distracted.