

How to Start Listening to Your Body

– **Deepak Chopra**

This may be hard to believe, but as a doctor I've seen many patients with beautiful, young, so-called perfect bodies who never listen to them. They are too worried to know what their bodies are actually saying. They are too wrapped up in body image and the whole scam about being perfect. Ironically, their bodies are all in their heads.

Your body and mind are meant to be a whole, and to ensure that they are, your whole existence is based on feedback loops.

Body listens to mind; mind listens to body. Awareness is the link.

Make no mistake: Every cell knows when you are un- happy, anxious or stressed. A cell's awareness is expressed in chemical reactions in- stead of words. No matter. The message comes through loud and clear.

Last week, we applied this to eating. Problems with diet, weight and body image be- gin in the mind, but as the body carries out the bad messages coming from the mind, it begins to mirror those messages and the beliefs that lie behind them.

That's why supermodels often get no happiness from their physical "perfection." Indeed, the better their bodies look, the more obvious it is to them that they don't deserve to have such a body or that it will betray them.

What can you do to start listening to your body?

The most basic elements are as follows:

Feel what you feel. Don't talk yourself into denial.

Accept what you feel. Don't judge what's actually there.

Be open to your body. It's always speaking. Be willing to listen.

Trust your body. Every cell is on your side, which means you have hundreds of billions of allies.

Value spontaneity. Emotions change, cells change, the brain changes. Don't be the policeman who stops the river of change by blocking it with frozen, fixed beliefs.

Enjoy what your body wants to do. Bodies like to rest, but they also like to be active. Bodies like different kinds of food that are eaten with enjoyment. Bodies like sex and pleasure in general.

What part does spirituality play in listening to your body?

These are all primary things to pay attention to. Yet on a subtler level, bodies like to be spiritual. Bliss and ecstasy don't belong in the souls of saints alone.

They course through the body, bringing a sense of ease, lightness, alertness, energy and exuberance. Your cells feel all these things and want you to feel them too. How? By learning, day by day, to pay more attention to what your body is saying.

As the layers of indifference, judgment and denial peel away, the underlying joyful life will emerge.

One of the most basic ways to be aware is by grounding yourself in the body.

There is no mystery to it. Simply feel your body whenever you've been distracted. Let's say you're driving a car, and somebody cuts you off.

Your normal reaction is to be agitated or angry; you jump out of the calm, relaxed focus that connects you to the mind- body field. Instead of being overshadowed by this disruption, just go within and feel the sensations of your body.

Take a deep breath, since that is an easy way to come back to body awareness. Keep your attention on these sensations until they disappear. What you've done is cut off the stimulus response with a gap. A gap is an interval of non-reaction.

It stops the reaction from fueling itself. It reminds the body of its natural state of

harmonious, coordinated self-regulation. And that grounds you. It's easy because harmonious self-regulation is the body's ground state.

Stress pulls you into another state of heightened biological response that triggers a flow of hormones, increased heart rate, hyper vigilance of the sense and many other linked reactions.

But all are temporary; they are emergency measures only. If you allow the stress reaction to become a habit, however, disharmony enters the field of mind and body.

The normal state of relaxed awareness tries to co-exist with the disrupted, agitated state of the stress response. The two don't mix; they aren't meant to exist at the same time.

Anytime you're feeling distracted, overwhelmed, stressed or overshadowed, there's a tendency to escape.

The state of denial is an escape. Distracting yourself through overwork is an escape. Altering your mind with drugs and alcohol is an escape. What they all have in common is absence of awareness. You numb or distract yourself under the false belief that unawareness will help you, while being too aware will only increase your pain.

In reality, the opposite is true. Awareness heals because awareness is the only thing that is truly whole and healing is fundamentally a return to wholeness.

3 practical things you can do right now to get on the road to awareness

1. I will make choices to maximize the energy in my body.

My body is my connection to the infinite supply of energy in the universe. If am feeling lack of energy in any way, it means that I am resisting the flow of this infinite supply. I will ask my body what it needs and will sincerely follow its advice. The ideal state is to experience such lightness that I do not feel bounded by my body. It and the world are one.

2. Before I act on any emotion, I will consult my heart.

My heart is a reliable guide when I trust it. It monitors the emotions of others

around me. This helps me experience empathy, compassion and love. The heart is the seat of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence allows me to get in touch with my deepest self. It nurtures all relationships by reminding me to see myself in the other.

3. Lightness of being in my body will be my indicator of happiness.

If I feel heavy or dull in my body, I will pay attention because these feelings are signs that I am inertia and the dreariness of habit over the potential that every moment has for freshness and new life(NOTE: does this mean sense? he is the dreariness of habit?). The best way to replenish my body is to give it what it needs most, whether it's sleep, rest, life-giving nourishment, the joy of movement or communion with nature.