



Cultivating the Sensing Body

Return to the body

Feeling the weight of the body resting on your seat or feet.

Letting your weight sink and come to rest.

Opening to the sensations and movements of the naturally breathing body.

Opening, feeling, resting, breathing.

Feeling the body in the space of this room, opening to sights and sounds.

Opening out as well as in.

Breathing in and out, gently opening to sensations as they arise

Noticing sensations, movement, energy, tension, release around the eyes, throat, chest, solar plexus, and belly. Just noticing.

Breathing in and out, movements and sensations arising and subsiding.

Again and again, returning and resting in the breathing body.

Go beyond the five senses. There are many sensory fields, with infinite qualities. We rely heavily on seeing and hearing and touching, but what about our ever-present ability to sense the posture of our body, the position of one part of the body to the other parts, and our sense of movement? How about our inner ear and our center of gravity cooperating to create our sense of balance? How about our ability to sense direction and location? Our subcutaneous and internal sense of touch that includes pressure, pain, movement of internal organs? These are all available, any time.

Labeling sensations with words isn't necessary -- in fact labeling may even take your attention away from the sensations themselves. But it's sometimes helpful to remind oneself of the endless diversity of sensations, to appreciate and invite opening to them. Here are a few:

Aching	Cramping	Heavy	Pulsing	Stabbing
Balance	Crowded	Hollow	Resting	Tension
Blushing	Dizzy	Hot	Rising	Throbbing
Bubbling	Dry	Itching	Rough	Tingling
Burning	Dull	Jumpy	Shaking	Trembling
Buzzing	Empty	Light	Shapes	Twisting
Chills	Expanding	Melting	Shrinking	Twitching
Clammy	Falling	Pounding	Sinking	Vertigo
Cold	Floating	Pressure	Smooth	Vibrating
Colors	Flushed	Prickling	Sounds	Warm
Cool	Goosebumps	Pulling	Spacious	Waves

Where is each sensation in the body? Explore its location, movement, and qualities.

If you have difficulty detecting sensations, try gently exploring:

What are the size, shape, and texture of whatever parts of the body you happen to notice

Feel sensations or tension in shoulders, neck, eyes, face, tongue

What is the tilt of the head and neck, your spine from head to tailbone, your overall posture?

What are the qualities of your breathing: is it tight or open? shallow or deep? fast or slow? Feel your heart beating as you breathe. You could touch the pulse at your wrist as you breathe. Then try feeling your heart beat without touching your pulse.

If you're overwhelmed by sensations and energy:

Send some of your attention down into your belly, legs, and feet.

Feel where you contact the seat or floor.

Put a little more attention on the out-breath.

Let the body exhale completely and inhale naturally.

Practice sensing without getting lost or caught up in emoting and storytelling.

As you become familiar with the constant flow of sensations, watch instinctive liking and disliking arise quite rapidly along with sensations. Watch as like and dislike evolve into complex emotions and stories.

Don't try to stop emotions and thoughts, but don't get fixated on their content. One way not to get lost is to feel the tone, pace, and rhythm of stories; stories come with lots of sensations. The key may be to continue to *attend to breathing in and out* as sensations, feelings, emotions and stories arise and subside. Feel the sensations and movements of the naturally breathing body. Awareness riding the breath in and out.

See if you can gently set aside any fascination with the apparent *meaning* of sensations. We don't need to *make sense* of experience -- *just sense* what arises and subsides in the breathing body. Memories, emotions, and meanings have a way of taking care of themselves as we cultivate a capacity to rest in the breathing body. The body (that is, sensing) is the first foundation of mindfulness.

Resting in the breathing body keeps us grounded in the here and now of direct experience. Explore opening to, and resting in, the arising and subsiding of sensations while lying down, sitting, standing, walking, and talking. This is ana-pana-sati: remembering to breathe -- sensing what arises and subsides in the body, breathing in and out with awareness.