

Body Listening CHEAT SHEET

How to tell what your body needs ASAP.

By Nyssa Hanger

Body-Listening Cheat Sheet

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Not feeling your best but aren't sure what you need to feel better?

Try our Body-Listening Cheat Sheet to get a handle on what's best for your body right now.

But First...

In case you don't know me, I'm Nyssa Hanger.

I'm a second-generation aromatherapist and budding herbalist who's obsessed with the body, healing, and spirituality.

I believe in a world of infinite connection, and that turning dreams into reality is magic that we all have access to—if we can just get out of our own way.

Find out more about me at www.nysshanger.com/about.

Now, let's get to it ...

THE DEAL:

It's time to befriend your buddy.

Here's the deal.

Our bodies are intelligent beings that are constantly giving us feedback on our needs.

The thing is, they aren't always telling us what we want to hear. We can also be really good at ignoring them. Like not-realizing-there's-a-problem-until-it's-way-too-late good.



We forget that our body is our buddy.

It's the only physical thing that's with us from beginning to end.

Though it doesn't entirely define who we are, it is an essential part of who we are, and its health and vitality can and does effect our experiences.

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THE CHECKLIST:

For reference when you need direction in self-care.

Think of this as a cheat sheet to reference when you're not feeling your best and want to do something about it, but you just don't know where to start.

Are you hydrated?

When was the last time you drank water?

Is your mouth dry?

How much water have you had today?

Are you nutritionally fulfilled?

When was the last time you had fresh vegetables?

What quality was the protein from your last meal?

What quality were the carbohydrates in your last meal?

Consider what you've eaten over the past week. On a scale of 1-10, how much variety was there in terms of high-quality food?

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Are you moving enough?

How does your body want to move?

When was the last time you performed your favorite physical activities?

When is your next opportunity to move your body?

Are you feeding your spirit?

Is your mind able to settle, and are you able to sustain a positive, joyful, or content perspective?

How do you express your creativity? When was the last time you did this?

Are your days characterized by worry, anxiety, depression, or exhaustion?

What brings you joy?

How is your breathing?

Take a full breath. How do you feel now?

When was the last time you took a few minutes to do some conscious breathing?

If it's been a while, can you do this right now?

DESIGN YOUR BODY-LISTENING EXPERIMENT

Allow yourself some time to be quiet and begin reflecting on these questions honestly. Know that this is only research; you are only collecting information. It is NOT a call to judge, criticize, or reprimand yourself.

If you find yourself going to that dark place of “not being good enough,” then start with the last question. “What brings you joy?” Find a way to get more joy in your day, then return to the other questions and see if you can reflect from a lighter mood. Feel free to try several joy-inducing activities.

Sometimes when we answer these questions honestly, we can start to feel down on ourselves. I find that thinking of things in terms of an “experiment” and a collection of data helps. Then I can then make more informed decisions and shift myself out of any self-condemning or critical thoughts.



For example, if I notice that I haven't been getting enough quality sleep, that I'm regularly and actively doing things to discourage quality sleep, AND I'm ignoring the practices that I know help promote quality sleep, I might start to feel bad about my behaviors. Instead, if I just back up and look at the situation more objectively, I can approach these observations with more curiosity, rather than judgement.

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There are five steps to designing and implementing your Body-Listening Experiment.

Research: Ask yourself the questions listed above, and genuinely reflect on where you're at. Use this to inform your chosen variable.

Design: Based on the answers to your questions above, pick one of the sections and decide on one small thing you can change. Need help? Refer to my Top 10 Ways to Make Natural Medicine a Daily Habit below.

Execute: It's simple as this: do it!

Reflect: How did it go? How are you feeling? Would you like to do this again?

Repeat: Depending on how things go, you might want to repeat this same experiment another time. If not, repeat this whole process and choose another variable to change.

YOUR BREATH:

Better Breathing 101

There's a reason that the etymologies for breath, life, and spirit are all related.

Breathing is how we connect to ourselves and the world around us. It connects us to other humans, plants, and for those who are spiritually-inclined, God.

If we were to choose a single tool for our medicine box, our breath is the most accessible and rewarding remedy.

When it comes to mindfulness/meditation, or whatever you want to call the practice of calm and conscious breathing, it is helpful to have something for the mind to do.

Here are instructions for 3 different breathing exercises that are simple and effective.

These exercises give you something to pay attention to, while also facilitating better breathing and creating a calmer mental landscape.

Try them anytime you need a quick pick-me-up and reset.

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Three-Part Breath

Place your hands on your belly around the belly button. Begin by taking a breath into your belly and feeling the movement of your hands. You might even imagine that you're pushing your hands outward in front of you with your belly. Do this through several breath cycles.

Then, place your hands on the sides of your rib cage. Breathe into where your hands touch your body, imagining that you're pushing your rib cage out toward the sides. Take at least three full breath cycles here.

Next, place your hands on the upper part of your chest, with your fingertips resting on your collarbones. Here, begin to breathe into the top of your lungs. Feel your hands lifting up toward your chin, as you imagine expanding your chest upward to allow for more air flow. Again, enjoy three full breath cycles here.

Then, space one hand on your belly and the other on your chest. Begin to fill each part with a full in-breath; first, fill the belly, then feel the rib cage expand; lastly, lift the collarbones, allowing in one last sip of air.

As you exhale, release in the opposite direction: allow the collarbones to fall, the rib cage to come back together, and the belly to soften and flatten. Take several breaths here, filling and releasing each of these parts. Then return back to "normal" breathing, and see how you feel!

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Counting and Holding

There are many variations on this, but the idea is the same. You breathe in for a count of 10, hold for a count of 5, and breathe out for a count of 10.

You might try breathing in and counting to whatever number comes naturally for you. Then, hold this breath for a few seconds and exhale, adding 1 or 2 counts to the length of your in-breath.

Some of us don't always exhale all of our air, so having a slightly longer out-breath helps us fully empty out the lungs. This creates space for more delicious oxygen to come our way.

Mantra

This is a practice used often in meditation and mindfulness. A mantra is a word or phrase, often used repeatedly, out loud or silently, to keep the mind focused.

You can use any word or phrase that is meaningful to you. It can be as simple as "breathe in" on your in-breath and "breathe out" on your out-breath. If there are things that you'd like to let go of and bring in, you could use those words. For example, think or say, "Breathing in self-love," and "Breathing out self-judgement." Or maybe you repeat an affirmation like, "I am loved," as you breathe in and out. The possibilities are endless! Just pick something that resonates with you in this moment, and use it consistently to see how it goes.

MY TOP 10 FAVORITE WAYS TO MAKE NATURAL MEDICINE A DAILY HABIT

Natural medicine works best within a holistic lifestyle. But what does that really mean? Annie Dillard says, "How we spend our days is how we spend our lives." How many days will we allow to go by thinking, "I'll change that tomorrow."

Sure, each day will differ depending on the ebbs and flows of life's cycles. But we are the ultimate designers of our days, and there are so many things we can do right now to build habits for the future. Don't wait to get sick to add these practices to your days. Instead, begin today.

Below are my top 10 favorite ways to make natural medicine a daily habit. They may seem simple, but that doesn't detract from how powerful they can be, particularly with daily repetition.

Pick one or two to start with. Then, as they become staples in your days, add more. Feel free to add your favorite practices as well.



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1. Conscious breathing

This means being aware that you are breathing. So often, we forget about our breath, but the healing power of consciously taking a few breaths should not be underestimated. Don't believe me? Just try it out a few times a day over the course of a few days and see what happens. (See Better Breathing 101 for some helpful hints.)

2. Drink more water and herbal tea.

We all know that hydration is a basic component of health and vitality. (I mean, every cell in our bodies requires water to function, so ... it's pretty essential.) But it doesn't have to be all water all the time. One of my herbalism teachers says, "Water is meant to hold things." By "things," she means micro-nutrients! Hopefully with a balanced diet, you are getting enough macronutrients, and herbal teas make a great supplement to a balanced diet. My (current) favorite nourishing tea is featured below. It is full of vitamins and can be consumed daily as a healthy tonic. But this is one of a million blends you can try! Get yourself some water, some herbs, and drink away!

Nourishing Herbal Blend VITAMIN TEA

This is my favorite blend of nourishing herbs. It is best when brewed overnight, but even steeping it for 20 minutes is great too.
It is a delicious daily tonic that's filled with vitamins and minerals.

2 parts Oatstraw
2 parts Red Clover
1 part Stinging Nettle
1 part Red Raspberry Leaves

Use 1 teaspoon of dried herb mix per ounce of boiling water.

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3. Eat the rainbow.

Variety is vitality when it comes to our diet. There are many different philosophies and dietary lifestyles one can choose from, but here is something I think most would agree with: the more color you have, the more nutrients you have. No matter how you design your diet, take some time to consider the color in your diet. By color, I mean color from fruits, vegetables, and other plant-based foods. It's more fun than counting calories or filling in your food groups, and there's much to be said about a meal that looks beautiful.

4. Eat your meals without distraction and outside whenever possible.

This is a hard one for many of us, but there is a lot to learn from conscious eating. Unlike meditation, this is an opportunity in mindfulness where we are actually doing something. And look how challenging many of us find this! One of my tricks is to take my meal outside if I can. Being around fresh air and plants helps ground me in the act of nourishing my body and cherishing the time (and good food!) that I have.

5. Get moving! Outside whenever possible.

This is another essential, no-brainer, healthy activity that many of us are not doing enough. As a lifetime bookworm and recovering workaholic, this one is particularly challenging for me. But after seeing one of my parents go through health issues that were exacerbated by spending too much time sitting, then seeing how transformative some regular, non-strenuous exercise was for them ... Well, I'm a believer in walks! There are a million and one (not that I counted) ways to move your body. It's just about finding what works for you. Some of my favorite ways to move are through walking, dancing, and jumping on my rebounder (also helps with #8!), and that's just right now. It's not about what you do. It's just that you do it. Period. Now, stop reading this and go outside.

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6. Create a morning ritual.

I like to think of rituals as “actions repeated with meaning.” More than habits, rituals are done with a kind of intention that gives them greater power than mere habits. So, there are certain things I like to do in the morning that are great daily habits with a larger sense of meaning. Walking my dog every morning is a sacred contract between my dog and myself, but it’s also a way for me to greet the day and set my intention for it. Taking a shower is more than just getting clean—it’s about cleansing myself and getting ritually pure. On the outside, it looks the same. But it’s the *intention* that makes all the difference.

7. Create an evening ritual.

Ditto Number 6. For me, the main difference between the nature of my morning and evening rituals is that the morning is centered on getting myself ready for the day (focusing on outward energy), whereas the evening is centered around connecting with my loved ones and my inner life. I like to make tea right after dinner to enjoy with my love on the couch and read. These simple actions help mark the day and reestablish my connection to my home and family.

8. Practice lymphatic health with exercise, dry brushing, and hot/cold therapies.

Your lymphatic system is basically your body’s waste management system, but unlike other systems, there is no pump. That means it’s up to you to provide the movement needed for your lymph to flow, so your body can dispose of pathogens. Regular exercise and movement will pump this fluid, as will flushing the body with cool water, or even alternating hot and cold. One of my favorite practices is dry brushing with a natural bristle brush. Add a drop or two of your favorite essential oil, and brush the full body in directions that facilitate lymph flow. Then jump into a cool shower and finish with self-massage, using an aromatic body oil. That’s what I call a delightful morning ritual!

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9. Practice gratitude.

I learn this again each year with my 101 Days of Gratitude project. Creating a daily practice of gratitude can dramatically enhance your quality of life. It's easy to find things that we aren't thankful for, but working to find the things that we are thankful for is worth it. Don't underestimate the power of using gratitude inwardly as well. This means not just acknowledging what you're grateful for within yourself (I know those things are in there!), but also just inwardly expressing gratitude. Say thank you when you deposit a check, turn on the water, see your loved one come in the door, walk with no pain, or turn on your car. Experiment with seeing how many things in a day you can be grateful for. You might be surprised.

10. Do the things that bring you JOY.

Just today, I was listening to a story about someone who had been suffering from stress-induced vertigo. Do you know what their prescription was? To do things that bring them joy. Don't let stress build up so much to the point where the only thing getting your attention is your body breaking down. What are the things you enjoy just for the sake of doing them? What activities make you forget about time? Let yourself become fully absorbed in something that isn't work, chores, responsibilities, or that involves you saying the word "should." Joy is absolutely the best medicine.

Let's stay connected
through the *healing power* of going within

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You'll even get a guided meditation to help
keep your heart and mind open. :)