



The Brain:

The brain is like the body's control center. It helps us think, feel, move, and remember.

Trauma Changes Us

Impacting our Brain, Nervous System, and the way we exist in this world.

Ogden, et.al. (2006) emphasizes that the brain encodes trauma

**in implicit body memory &
motor patterns, NOT JUST
CONSCIOUS THOUGHT.**

Let's Focus briefly on **MUSCLE TENSION**:

Trauma often leaves the body experiencing

Ongoing muscle tightness, meaning the muscles stay partially tightened even when they don't need to be.

We often are not aware of this. This state is our "normal," unless we practice conscious attention and observation.

Examples of Muscle Tension:

Head & Neck

- Clenched jaw or tight face → can cause headaches or jaw pain
- Tight forehead or temples → often shows stress or worry
- Stiff neck → hard to turn head freely
- Head leaning forward → posture feels hunched or guarded

Shoulders & Upper Back

- Tense or raised shoulders → holding body tight
- Tight upper back muscles → hard to relax or move arms easily
- Shoulder blades held together or stiff → limits chest opening and movement
- Hunched posture → protective stance

Arms, Hands, & Fingers

- Clenched fists or tight hands → holding tension without noticing
- Stiff elbows or limited arm movement → hard to reach or stretch
- Arms held close to the body → protective posture
- Restricted spontaneous movement → feeling stuck

Chest & Abdomen

- Shallow or tight breathing → diaphragm is stiff, chest feels restricted
- Tight chest muscles → limits expansion and openness
- Stomach muscles held tight → body feels braced or tense
- Numbness or hollow feeling in torso → body feels disconnected

Examples of Muscle Tension (continued):

Pelvis & Hips

- Tight hip muscles → makes it hard to feel stable and grounded
- Tight glutes → body stays braced or stiff
- Pelvis held rigidly or tucked under → protective posture, limiting movement
- Limited hip movement → makes it harder to move freely and express yourself

Legs, Knees, Feet

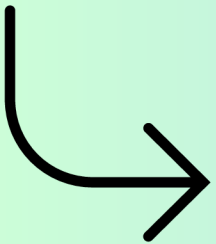
- Thighs held tightly together or tense
- Knee stiffness or locking
- Feet planted rigidly → difficulty shifting weight
- Hypervigilant stance → always “ready to flee”

Whole Body Patterns/Posture

- Stiff or frozen posture → body held tight overall
- Slumped or collapsed posture → body shuts down in low energy states
- Shifting between bracing and collapsing → moving between tension and shutdown
- Limited spontaneous movement → body feels stuck and restricted

Why This is Important, & How Mindfulness Can Help

Tension, Tight Muscles



Are our body's way of storing past danger. They react to current situations using old survival patterns that were helpful in the past but may no longer match the level of safety and resources available to us in the present.

- If we don't notice these patterns, our bodies can remain caught in stress, shutdown, or other states of nervous system dysregulation—even in situations where we may be relatively safe. Sometimes these states can overlap, creating mixed experiences of tension, alertness, or numbness.
- Understanding where and how our bodies hold tension helps us recognize early signs of stress, feel safer, and start to release stuck energy.

Why Mindfulness Practices Help

- Mindfulness teaches us to pay attention to our body and breath in the present moment.
- By noticing tension or discomfort without judgment, we can slowly release stress stored in muscles.
- Mindful movement, breathing, and awareness help our nervous system regulate, so we can move between tension and relaxation more easily.
- Over time, mindfulness helps our bodies feel safe, supports freer movement, and allows our mind and body to work together with more strength, ease, and empowerment.

References

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