

# My Body does what?: Exploring a Group Intervention to Improve Body Integration

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# Sensory Workshops: An intervention which could help demystify the body?

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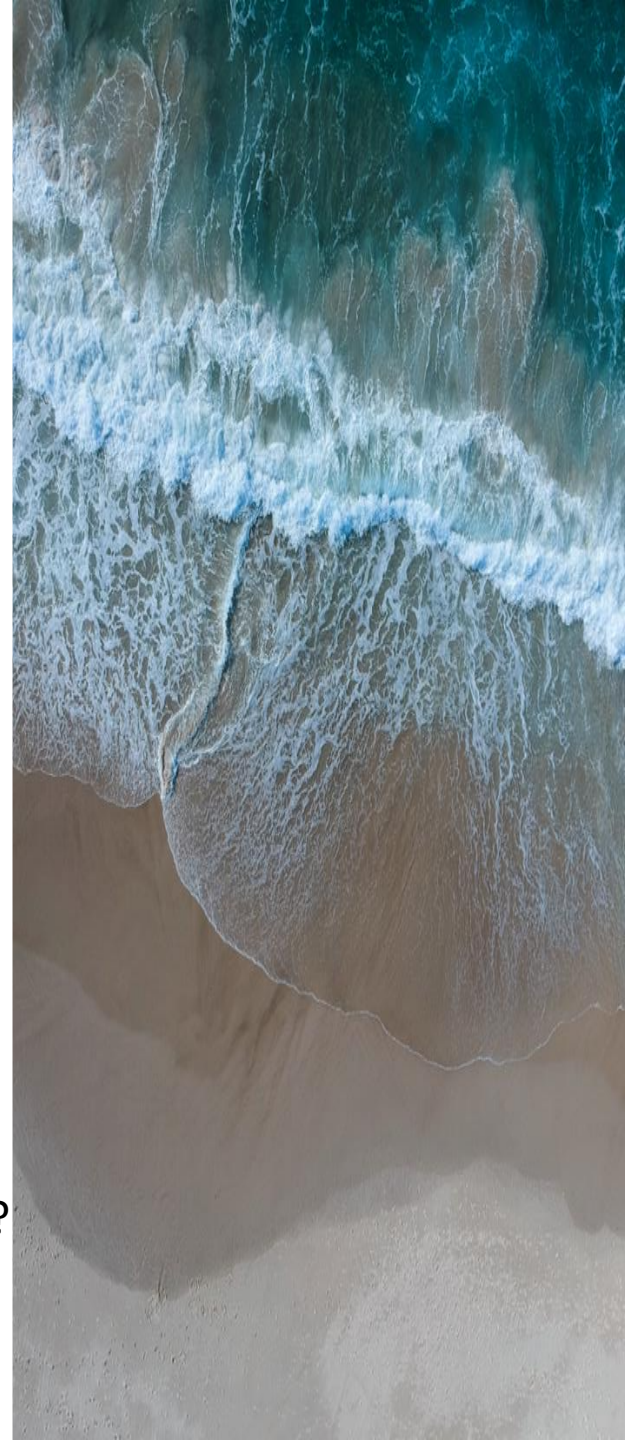
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- In 2021 I presented my clinical observations of the overlaps between AN and ASD with specific focus on the experience of embodiment
- I identified the ways in which existing treatment interventions offered ways to tap into different aspects of embodied experience, ways forward included making this more integrated and transparent for patients and staff
- Today I will present the development of these ideas and an initial outline for a group intervention aiming to support the integration/re-integration of embodied experience

# The Embodied Perspective

- Embodiment views experience as undifferentiated until dualist notions are overlaid upon it, via individuals being subject to cultural notions of mind separate from body (Overton, 2008).
- Merleau-Ponty (1962) proposed that embodiment is experienced like a shoreline
  - > suggesting fluidity and indefinable areas that are both water and sand yet are neither sea nor beach, in this view “mind” and “body” become far less distinct and the differentiation of them becomes less significant.
- From this perspective the language of “Body Image” reinforces the body as an object to be appraised rather embodiment which is experiential
- For various reasons people with ASD and/or AN often feel more comfortable disconnecting mind from body, the “rational” mind must dominate the “emotional” body which is confusing, annoying, demanding and unreliable.

So how could we further support patients to feel less fearful of embracing their embodiment?



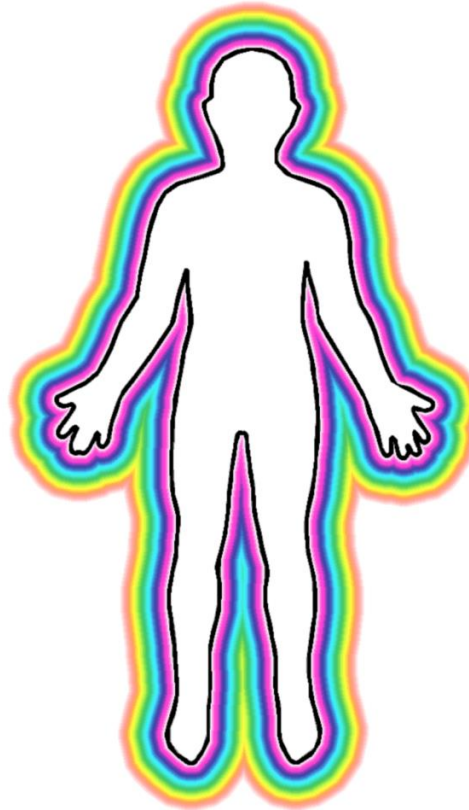
# How current inpatient interventions facilitate the integration of embodied experience.

## CREST:

Sensations need not be scary, they might tell you how you feel and what you need.

## Distress Tolerance:

Opportunities to practice strategies and notice changes to how you feel, including sensations.



## Sensory Workshops:

Understanding senses and utilizing them for self-soothing, pleasure or stimulation.

## Body Image:

Sensations -source of pleasure  
Senses provide examples of what our bodies allow us to do – reinforces importance of function.

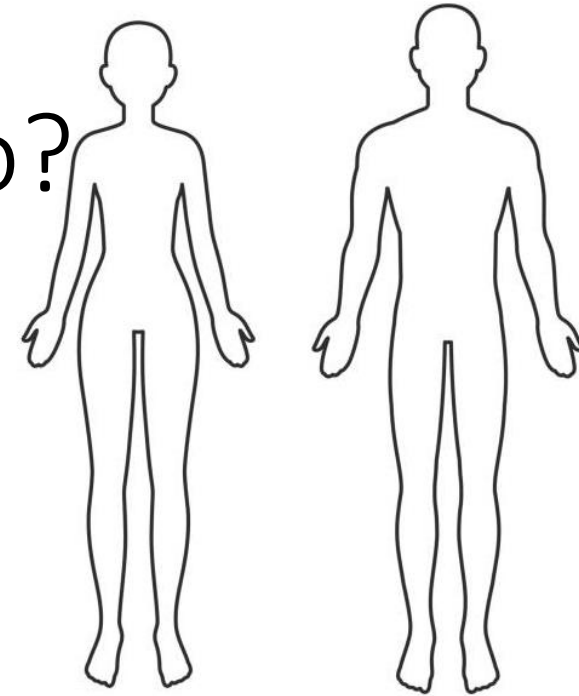
# Overview of My Body does What? (working title)

Proposed series of 5 workshops with the following themes

- Session 1: What can a Human Body do?
- Session 2: Bodily Needs
- Session 3: Emotions and the Body
- Session 4: The Sensory Body
- Session 5 The Wisdom of the Body



# Session 1: What can a human body do?



Aims: to encourage bigger picture view of their body as a human body as opposed to a different body

Intro: The experience of living in a body can be very complicated for people with ED's (and other mental health issues). The materials in these workshops are designed to help demystify the body, it is different from a body image group which might focus on specific thoughts, feelings and behaviours connected to feared judgements about the body's appearance. Instead these workshops will explore the human body from different perspectives to help people understand a bit about how it functions and appreciate the richness it adds to life.

- Discussion: what are the pros and cons of living in a human body?
- What does our human body enable us to do?

Use activity from Body Image group – on a body outline indicate all the different abilities, tasks and functions our bodies enable us to do.

- What would living in a non-human body be like?
  - Ask each person to pick an animal and imagine you lived in that body, what this would change about how you experience the world?
  - Think about what you would see, hear, feel differently if you were an animal e.g. a whale would not care about rain; a blackbird would not worry about gravity; a wolf might know where a friend has been by smell alone
  - Invite individuals to share, encourage a playful approach

HW: Appreciate one thing that your human body does for you over the next 7 days – however small or simple, just try to appreciate it.

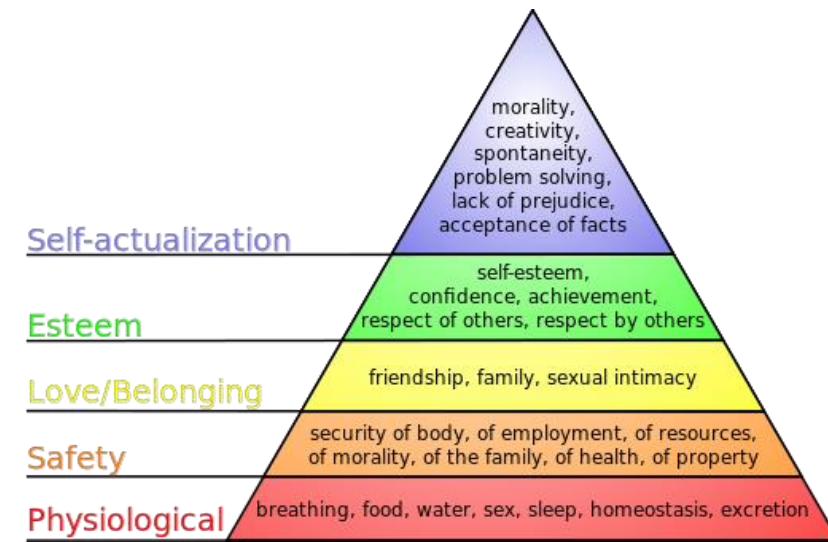


# Session 2: Bodily Needs

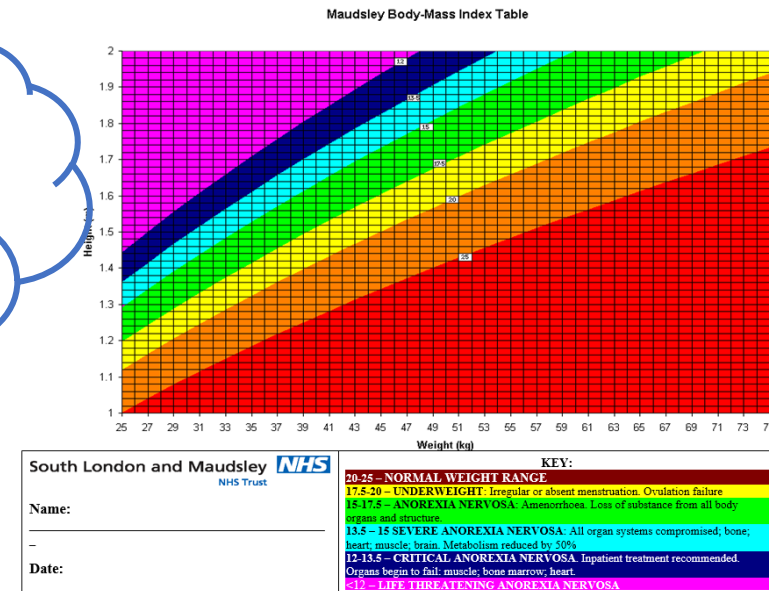
Aims: to normalise bodily requirements; to provide non-judgemental psychoeducation of risks/consequences in a motivational style meaning without pressure to identify how they will change/stop

Intro: Our bodies cannot survive without our help and assistance, today we will explore what the body requires and what can happen if we are not able to meet these needs adequately.

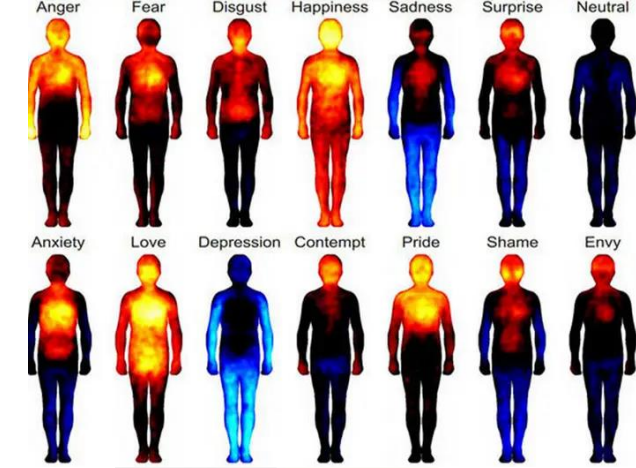
- Share Maslow's hierarchy of needs, highlight that physiological requirements are the foundation on which all other needs are built
- What does a human body need?
  - Group mind map – try to identify the specific physiological needs in the first step of the hierarchy
- Brief psycho-ed on why humans need:
  - Sleep
  - Physical rest
  - Nutrition
  - Fluids
  - Vaccinations/ Medical care for problems
- Why some ED behaviours can have negative consequences on health (use CCI handouts)
  - Brief psycho-ed on the health impact of:
    - Sleep deprivation
    - Compulsive exercise
    - Poor nutrition
    - Low BMI – rainbow chart
    - Dehydration
    - Purging of consumed calories



Involve medics and dieticians to add detailed content



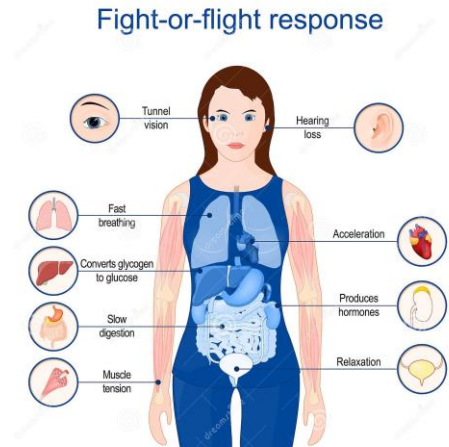
# Session 3: Emotions and the Body



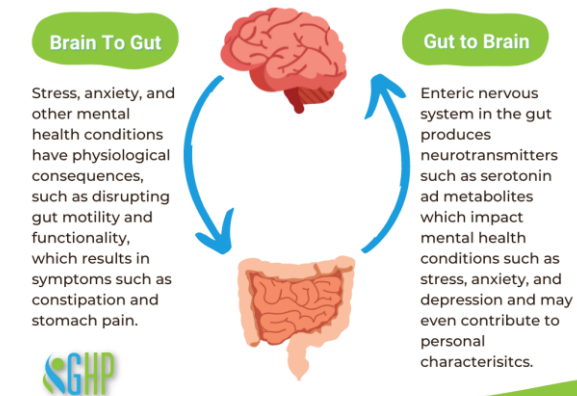
Aims: to raise awareness of the positive intention of body signals and the impact of thoughts and feelings on the body

Intro: Our bodies are constantly communicating with us; it is our job to listen and translate the messages. Equally our mind can have an impact on how our bodies feel.

- Psycho-education: emotions usually start with body sensations, each emotion feels slightly differently in the body so paying attention can help us identify how we feel
- Quiz – can you guess the emotion from body sensations? E.g. tense muscles + restless/fidgety + cold sweats + needing the toilet = anxious
- Psychoeducation then discussion: Anxiety: Fight and flight response – understanding the link between psychological and physiological components
- Psychoeducation then discussion: The gut-brain link – understanding psychological component of IBS/gastric discomfort
- HW: try an experiment, the next time you notice a strong body sensation adopt a curiosity approach – is my body sending this message to tell me something – what might the message be? Or has my mind influenced my body?



## What is the Gut-Brain Axis (GBA)?



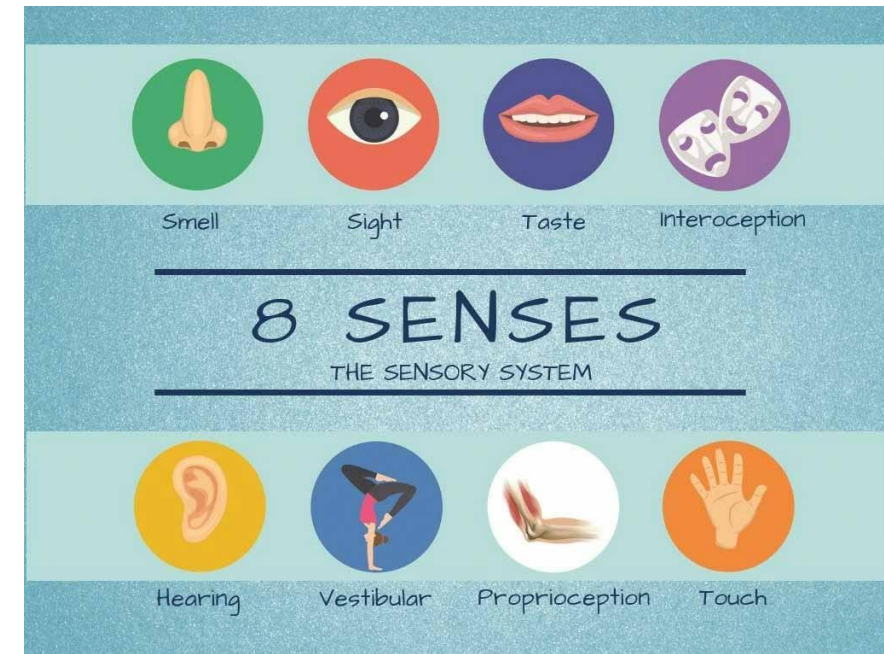


# Session 4: The Sensory Body

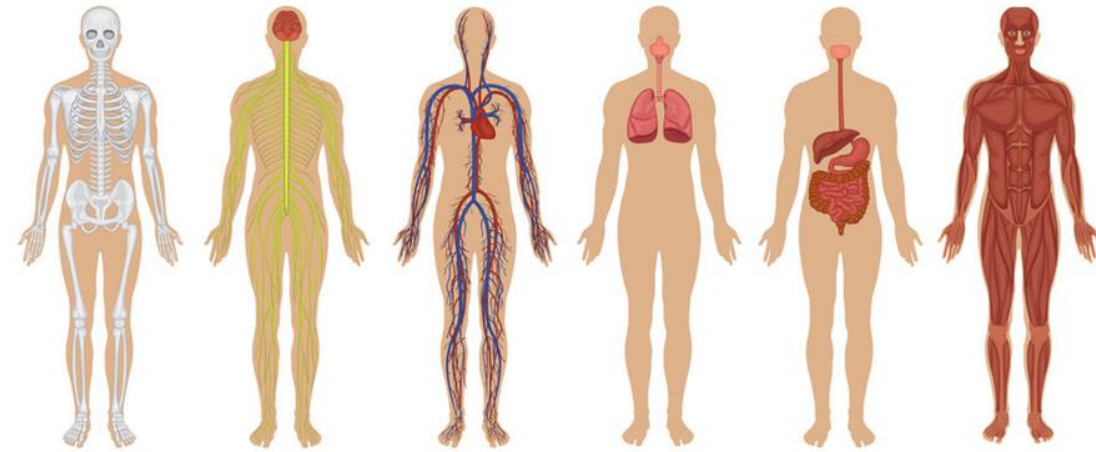
Aim: to explore the body as a source of both pleasure and discomfort

Intro: Our senses provide us with enormous amounts of information about the outside world, which can be both pleasant and unpleasant

- Provide an overview of the eight senses
- General discussion
  - which sense provides the most pleasure; which causes us the most difficulty? Which sense would you find it hardest to be without? – give example of covid changing people's sense of taste and smell
- Interoception exercise – how warm/cold feels against different body parts, which body part is most sensitive?
- Permitting the body to be a source of pleasure
  - Mind map: pleasant body sensations and what might provide these e.g. feeling cosy – soft warm clothes
- Quiz game - Better or worse – is a human's eyesight; hearing; smell etc. better or worse than ...
- HW: choose one pleasant sensory activity and try to do it over the next week



# Session 5: The Wisdom of the Body



Aim: to increase awareness of the automatic systems in the body, to foster increased trust and appreciation for the body

Intro: Our body is extremely wise and performs many functions to keep us alive and well that we are not even aware of

- Body map – small group task, on a body outline indicate which functions happen outside of our awareness? What tasks does our body do everyday that we don't even notice?
- Brief psycho-ed
  - Homeostasis (sweating/shivering)
  - Appetite (hunger; satiety)
  - Menstrual cycle
  - Pain to indicate a problem
  - Guarding – when the body involuntarily tenses muscle to prevent pain or further damage
  - Senses help us move away from danger and towards pleasure
  - Immune response – fights infection for us and makes us feel tired so we rest and recuperate
  - Healing – ability to repair itself in amazing ways (skin, muscle, bones etc.)
- Summing up: We have explored the body from lots of different perspectives including what it does for us, what it needs, how it communicates with us, how it provides information about our experiences and operates to keep us alive and well. It is doing all of these jobs, mostly without us even noticing its hard work. It works for us every moment we are alive, even if it isn't perfect, it is pretty amazing!
- Invite individuals to name the main message they want to hold onto from this series of workshops going forward
- Feedback – invite verbal feedback on what has been helpful and unhelpful about the sessions and provide measures and group feedback sheet for completion

# Next steps

- Involve dieticians and medics to refine psycho-ed materials
- Develop more in depth protocols for each session
- Consider appropriate outcome measures e.g. Scale of body connection (Price & Thompson, 2007)
- Canvas patient group to identify what they anticipate being able to tolerate, what think would be helpful and what they would like the workshops to cover
- Update protocol with service user feedback
- Run an initial pilot

# Any Questions/Comments?



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# References and Resources

Baillie, C. (2012) Researching the usefulness, if any, of the concept of embodiment to counselling psychologists working with individuals diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. (Unpublished doctoral thesis)  
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CCI Disordered Eating Information Sheets available here:

[Eating Disorders Self-Help Resources - Information Sheets & Workbooks \(health.wa.gov.au\)](http://health.wa.gov.au)