

If Your Body Could Talk

by Leslie A. Gray, LCMHC, RYT

If your body could talk, what would it say? Does it feel appreciated and accepted by you or does it feel judged or shamed? Self-care is a crucial part of the human experience. As a matter of fact, the way we take care of our bodies has a profound impact on our health overall, including mental health. This includes the type and amount of food we eat, water intake, exercise, sleep, substance use, and so on.

If your body could talk it might say, “Hey, listen. I bend to the point of breaking at times when you’ve pushed me so far beyond reasonable limits that I crack under the pressure. Then, when I require time to rest so I can heal myself, you get impatient with me because you can’t do as much as you’d like.”

Sound familiar? Or maybe the conversation goes like this:

“I’m the part of your body that stretches to make room for more of you because you’re building oversized muscles, eating more calories than I can reasonably burn, or decide to have a baby. But then, when my skin shows the signs of my hard work and my remarkable ability to adapt to what you put me through, you criticize me for having stretch marks. To add insult to injury, I’m also the one that gets verbally abused when you stop body building, go on a diet, or give birth to that baby, then expect me to be able to bounce back like an elastic. But you know what? Even elastics have their limits. It took time for me to stretch to make more room. It’s going to take time to reverse that and quite frankly, I may not be able to put that genie back in the bottle if you stretch me too far.”

Is this hitting home?

“I’m also the one who rallies the troops so you can work ridiculous hours doing hard manual labor. I give you motivation, energy, and drive. But then you get mad at me when I need a few extra minutes to get out of bed in the morning, grumbling at me when I creak from the pain of the day before. Good God, man, listen to the noises I make. I’m trying to tell you something.”

Your body does so much for you. It’s constantly working to keep you alive. It makes you breathe without any effort from you. It keeps your heart pumping blood through your entire system. It takes whatever you put in your mouth and moves it through your body, one way or the other, even when that food or drink has zero nutritional value. It does all of that for you every second of every day. Even when you’re sound asleep, it’s still hard at work.

Maybe your body doesn’t enjoy making you feel terrible when you put awful things in there but it doesn’t know a better way to get you to listen. Some of that stuff you’re giving yourself isn’t fit for human consumption and it doesn’t provide the fuel your body needs to do everything you want to do. That soda, coffee, and alcohol? ... it all dehydrates. But if it’s all you give yourself, your body has no choice but to make do with what you’ve given it. So, your body adapts. But then when you become chemically dependent on those things, you get mad at yourself.

If you don’t take good care of your body, it can’t do its job for you. And honestly, it’s not going to reward you for bad behavior so if you want to drink too much alcohol, expect to feel terrible the next day. It’s the only way your body can communicate that it’s too much. If you make unhealthy choices, expect to be unhealthy. You can’t expect your body to be the picture of health when your actions don’t provide what it needs to be healthy.

The hangover isn't the problem. The extra weight isn't the problem. The sore joints... they aren't the problem, either. They are all simply messages from your body that the choices you are making on the outside are causing problems on the inside that you can't see until it's too late.

Notice the internal dialogue about your body. If it is judgmental, imagine talking to someone else that way under the same circumstances. It's one thing to motivate with tough love when necessary... it's quite another to berate. I don't know many people who feel motivated to change as a result of the latter. I wouldn't expect it from you, either.

If your body could talk, what would it say? The truth is your body does speak to you in many creative ways. You just have to choose to listen.

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