

# Language of symptoms

## Is your **backache** or **migraine** trying to get your attention?

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

**D**oes thinking of someone as “a pain in the neck” cause neck pain? Has feeling “pissed off” ever coincided with cystitis? There are all sorts of ways our bodies and our language give us clues about how we could be feeling much better.

People who literally don't feel any pain are extreme but most of us can remember times when we've ignored what our body's been trying to tell us. Whether it was over-riding hunger (or being full and continuing to eat), drinking more than we can handle, carrying on working, exercising or staying up in spite of tiredness or countless other ways we set ourselves up for potential problems.

Louise Hay, with her best-sellers *Heal Your*

*Life and Love Your Body* revolutionised the way we think about illness and emotions. Many healing professionals now believe that symptoms are symbolic of deeper causes.

Everything can be used as a metaphor, from feet and legs indicating fears about moving forward to stomach problems suggesting life feels overwhelming and, literally, impossible to digest. See the panel for some potential clues and, next time you're aware of pain or discomfort, pay attention to see what messages it might have for you.

“Our physical sensations can often be a good indication on how we truly feel about someone or our external environment,” says Lisa Clifford, a Psychotherapist who specialises in bodywork ([www.bodymindmeetingplace.co.uk](http://www.bodymindmeetingplace.co.uk)). “Be aware of your of how your body

feels as well as how you mentally react to a situation. Regular body sensing is a good idea, using meditation or breathing exercises. When you focus on the breath, it helps to declutter the mind. It will offer you a clearer relationship with how your body is feeling. Often, we get stuck in our heads and lose the relationship with our gut feelings.

“The mind has a life time of memories and associations which stops us truly experiencing a new and fresh experience without the influence psychological ‘old baggage’. Somatic illnesses can often be that old baggage being stirred up and released through a physical symptom. Think of how you can suddenly get ill when you are obligated to something you really do not want to do.”

According to Lisa, when this happens, the body may be trying to tell us that we don't want to see a particular person or face a situation or even just need to learn how to say “no”. While this remains unconscious, our bodies can appear to sabotage us. But by tuning in and paying attention, you can start making changes to your life that will help your body stay healthy. →



## Get used to checking in with yourself and just asking yourself how you feel at random points throughout the day



### What to do if something hurts

This isn't something to be done instead of seeking medical attention, but if it's OK to sit with it, take some time to ask your ear / back or knee etc. "What are you trying to tell me?"

Make a note of the first answer or image that pops into your head. Draw it if this feels easier. Once you've written or drawn as much as you need, sit with your handiwork and look at it.

Without censoring yourself, think about the pain and images and think about your life. Does what you've written or drawn relate to a situation that's been on your mind (or maybe, that you've been trying to not think about)?

Get used to checking in with yourself and just asking yourself how you feel at random points throughout the day. It may be when you're stuck in traffic (not while driving – please) / on a train or bus or even when you're waiting for a slow document to load on your computer. Scan your body from head to toe and pay

attention to any tension, stresses, discomfort, pain. Allow yourself to feel.

Think about what you can do to ease the tension (a little yoga? Making an appointment with your GP or massage therapist? Running yourself a hot bath at the earliest chance you get? Going for a swim / run / cycle? Having a conversation you've been putting off?).

Are you hungry? Have you eaten or drunk something you know doesn't agree with you?

Make friends with your body. You'll probably find that the kinder you are to it, the more picky it will become (whereas it let you get away with not exercising and eating junk for days on end before, it'll tell you much sooner) but ultimately, you're on the same side.

We only have the one body. The earlier we can learn to give ours what it needs, the better off we'll be well into old age.

## “Our physical sensations can often be a good indication on how we truly feel about someone or our external environment” Lisa

→ “The best example of how an emotion or a state of mind can affect the body is when someone has a panic attack,” says Lisa. “The attack is an expression of something in the mind that has not had a chance to be processed. The person having the attacks cannot understand how the environment around them can change from a familiar place to one which provokes deep fear and anxiety. The anxiety attack can result in a physical constriction of the body, through muscular tension as the body is in a state of panic.

“Anxiety attacks normally leave when a person has had a chance to bring some awareness to the original situation that brought about the feeling of fear. A body psychotherapist might consider that the deep rooted emotion associated with the past experience was not fully resolved. The body is stuck in a constant state of anxiety which is stimulated by different environmental or relational factors. The client needs to, in their own time, go through the physical process of feeling and releasing the anxiety

whilst dipping in and out of the original trauma that caused the panic attack.

“If emotions are not fully expressed and allowed to go through a cycle of being fully realised, felt and finally released, the body can hold on to that emotions through physical pain and tension.”

Sometimes, the pain we experience physically gives us the impetus to get to the bottom of emotions we’ve been holding onto. If it weren’t for chronic pain, we might never delve deep enough. ●

### What might your symptoms be trying to tell you?

**HEADACHES** – Do you feel like you’ve been banging your head against a brick wall?

**EYES** – Is there something you wish you didn’t have to see?

**EARS** – Something you don’t want to listen to?

**NOSE** – Are you concerned about being nosy in some way?

**THROAT** – Is there something you’re afraid of saying?

**NECK** – Are you feeling vulnerable? Like you’re sticking your neck out?

**SHOULDERS** – Are you feeling overly burdened by something?

**HEART** – Have you experienced heartbreak? Do you feel like you have a heavy heart?

**ARMS** – Is something feeling out of reach?

**STOMACH** – Is there something you’re struggling to digest? Can’t even stomach?

**LEGS** – Are you feeling tired with lots of legwork?

**FEET** – Worried about putting your best foot forward? Moving in the wrong direction? Concerned about getting “cold feet”?

