

**T**he body during a deep meditation becomes exceptionally relaxed, but not limp in any way. The state of heightened awareness and expansion that takes place for the mind is expressed at a physical level as well. The skin becomes shiny, every pore radiating vitality. The body is bursting with prana. I sometimes feel this prana in my face, where it can seem like my cheeks are bursting.

The body is actually a vessel or conductor of energy. A straight back allows the current of energy, or Kundalini, to rise unobstructed from the base of the spine to the top of the head, and beyond. When one meditates, with legs crossed and the hands resting on the knees, there is a sense of perfect balance. The body is erect, no longer by any force of will, but by the sheer force of the Kundalini itself. One feels that no power in the universe can budge them. They are a pillar of strength and stability.

If the breathing is very deep, it sometimes seems that the vital air or prana fills the body completely. The body can feel hollow, certainly very light. Sometimes the breathing can be very subtle, to the point that it may seem like you are not breathing at all. This is not the shallow respiration we practice when we are preoccupied or stressed. It is rather a state where the breathing has become so fine, that it is simply prana you are drawing into yourself.

# THE PHYSICAL BODY IN MEDITATION



A person in a pink shirt and black pants is performing a yoga pose on a rocky cliff edge. The background shows a vast, mountainous landscape with green valleys and snow-capped peaks under a bright sky. The person is standing on a narrow, flat rock ledge that juts out from a steep cliffside. The valley below is filled with green vegetation and small settlements, with a river or stream visible in the distance. The overall scene is one of a serene, high-altitude natural setting.

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There are subtle energies that circulate through the body during a meditation. It is not necessary to get hung up about them, and it is best to trust that the process is working well on all levels. Such movements of energy are sometimes felt as a tingling or pressure in different areas, such as the crown of the head, the brow, or parts of the face. Some people feel a pressure in the chest. The heart is opening in such cases, and emotions may well to the surface. All of these experiences are very individual, and some people never have them.

If you are feeling a lot of heat in your body, it is best to meditate indoors, away from direct sunlight, or at least in a nice breeze. To keep cool, it may be desirable to drink water during and after a meditation. At other times, the body can feel cold, and wrapping oneself in a shawl helps conserve heat. Such temperature fluctuations involve subtle changes in the vital body, and also relate to the Kundalini's arousal. They should not be a cause for concern.

In cases where heat or discomfort is localized, there may be some energy block to work through. Such blocks will almost always dissolve with regular meditation. They may relate to parts of the body that are weak or vulnerable in some way. The point is that meditation is not some passive process, but is actually exceptionally dynamic. Not only the mind is finding release, but different levels of the gross and subtle bodies as well.

The body will often present distractions for the mind, but as you meditate these will become less prominent. Some of these hurdles relate to particular sensitivities. I used to wear earplugs while I meditated, but now random noises just seem

to blend into the background of my attention. My left ankle used to fall asleep, but this rarely happens now. I still feel some soreness in my knees, and I deal with this by shifting my position every thirty minutes or so, or putting a cushion under one of them for support.

The point is that one will rarely find perfection in their physical state. Various levels of discomfort may be experienced, and it is just a question of accepting that they are part of the mechanism you have to work with. On the other hand, there are also certain aspects of one's lifestyle which will help purify the body, and make it a clearer channel for the energy to rise in the spinal column.

What about the mundane distractions of the body? For instance, people ask me what to do if they get itchy. The answer, of course, is to scratch! The goal of meditation is not to maintain a rigid state of immobility, like a rock. If you have to go to the bathroom, don't sit there suffering in silence. By all means, give the body its due. If your feet are feeling numb, wiggle your toes or change position.

The body has persistence when it comes to communicating its needs. To resist will defeat the purpose of the meditation, which is to achieve a state of ease. If you are feeling ill, or experiencing pain, stop meditating and attend to your health. It is difficult to go inward, or achieve any state of transcendence, when the consciousness is constantly pulled toward one's discomfort.

For most people in this harried world there is a stress that is built into their lifestyle, and this tension is often demonstrated in stiffness of the muscles and in restlessness. When people first start meditating, they often find the task of sitting still for even a few moments quite

challenging. It may even feel that their bodies are rebelling against this situation. Sitting still may feel "unnatural", or even torturous. Such feelings often subside after a few weeks of regular meditation, after which, it is the agitation that rightly begins to feel "unnatural".

There are many ways agitation and stress can show up in the body. Sometimes it takes the form of persistent itching, as twitches, or as muscle aches in the back or shoulders. I notice that if my back is sore, it is harder to maintain a straight posture while meditating. A warm bath or shower before meditation will often help relax the body, although if it is very warm, it can create some sluggishness as well. Water will generally wash away any negative or unhealthy vibrations in the aura. A good self-massage is also useful for dealing with tension in the neck or shoulders.

If you feel restless during a meditation, there are a few ways to handle the situation. Sometimes, it can be rewarding to ride out such feelings. The body will likely settle down eventually. Some of my deepest meditations have come after I persisted despite an initially difficult period. It may be useful to change positions, or just to stretch your legs and shake them a bit, or turn your body to left and right. I like to do a forward bend over my out-stretched legs. These are little stretches to release tensions during a meditation, or when your feet begin to feel sore or numb.

*Bio: Charles Shahar: Charles has lived and studied Vedanta philosophy in India. He has been teaching yoga and meditation for seventeen years to diverse populations. He has also published several articles in Yoga & Health Magazine, Positive Living Magazine, and Kindred Spirit.*