

# Cultivating pleasure

There are many forms of pleasure, such as the pleasures of our senses and bodies, the pleasures of being together with people we love, and the pleasures of living in ways that are aligned with our values.

As trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary people, we may have experienced dysphoria, discomfort, confusion or shame about our bodies, and this may make it more difficult to connect to pleasure.

This resource offers suggestions to help you seek out the things that bring you embodied satisfaction, calm and joy. You may journal, draw, or record your responses to the questions, or you may use them to guide you in reflection.

**Go at your own pace and only try what feels right for you.**



## Contents

- Sink into sensation
- Learning your preferences
- Feeling satisfied
- Where do you feel sensation?
- Journal prompts

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# *Sink into sensation*

Many of us have a distanced relationship to our body's sensations, especially sensations of pleasure. We might have developed a protective distance or disconnection from our bodies, to avoid feelings of pain, dysphoria, or discomfort. It might even feel easier for us to provide pleasure to others than to seek out and enjoy pleasure for ourselves!



To connect with our bodies and feelings of pleasure, we can intentionally sink into sensation.

Start small. Pause, notice, and enjoy sensations of pleasure in your body.

Try to do this during small, everyday moments of pleasure—like when you are looking at a beautiful view, eating a delicious bite of food, putting on comfortable clothing, bathing, stretching, enjoying the sun on your skin, or listening to music.

What embodied pleasures do you enjoy in your day?

While you are savouring an experience, your mind might automatically search for words and meanings to help you understand your experience. Notice this, and gently return your attention to immediate sensation.

Here are some ideas to help you sink into sensation:

## **What does the sky look like right now?**

- What are the colours, shades and textures you see?
- Try to admire it for its appearance, without thinking about what it might mean for the weather later.

## **What does a piece of music sound like?**

- Listen to the sounds without thinking about the song as a story.
- What feelings in your body come up while you are listening?

## **How does an everyday object feel in your hands?**

- Focus on its weight, shape, temperature, and textures, rather than the object's usual uses.
- Close your eyes if it helps bring focus.
- Or, look closely at its colours, shadows and highlights.

If you would like to strengthen feelings of pleasure in your body, try to take time to regularly notice and savour feelings of pleasure. By taking time often to notice and experience it, we can feel pleasure more strongly, and learn to anticipate it and seek it out.

# Learning your preferences

If we are not used to paying attention to our own preferences, it can be difficult to notice our body's messages about what we do and do not want.

We can practice growing our awareness of our own preferences by starting small.

Here are some suggestions to consider your preferences:

## Notice touch

### Touch from yourself

- What kind of touch do you enjoy from yourself?
- Do you like the feeling of how you scrub your head when you wash your hair? If not: what could you change to enjoy it?
- Apply some moisturizer, lotion, or oil. Do you like to apply it with long or short strokes?  
Light or deep pressure?

### Touch from others

- What kind of touch do you prefer from others?
- Do you want big bear hugs?  
A pat on the back? No touch at all?
- Do these preferences change with context?
- Do you prefer different kinds of touch when you're in need of comfort versus when you're relaxed?

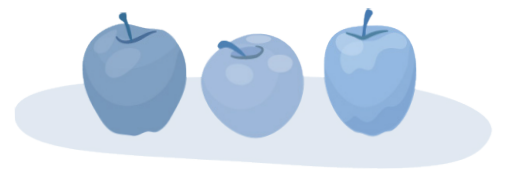
## Notice smell and taste

### Seek out and enjoy smells

- What smells are grounding or soothing? A candle? A pet's fur?
- What smells do you find energizing?
- What perfumes or soaps smell pleasant to you?
- What nature smells do you like?  
Fresh rain? Pine trees? An ocean breeze? Rocks on a warm day?

### Seek out and enjoy tastes

- What textures and tastes do you especially enjoy?
- Buy three of the same fruit. How do the tastes and textures compare between them?



**Remember:** the type of sensations you like can shift over time, or in response to surgery, hormones, or other life experiences. Discovering these shifts can give you clues about how your body is handling a change.

- What new sensations do you enjoy?
- What sensations do you no longer desire?
- What sensations are you curious about exploring?

# Feeling satisfied

When we only focus on what's next, what's lacking, or what could be better, we may find it hard to feel rest and ease. This is an invitation to notice when you are feeling satisfied.

When we notice what satisfaction feels like for us, we can learn how it differs from other experiences. We might begin to notice that we are satisfied when we are also experiencing a range of other emotions: joy, sorrow, confusion, happiness, contentment.

To practice noticing feeling satisfied, after you have had a pleasurable experience, you might ask yourself:

- How am I experiencing satisfaction?
- How does it feel in my body?
- Have I experienced this feeling before?
- How is this different from other feelings?



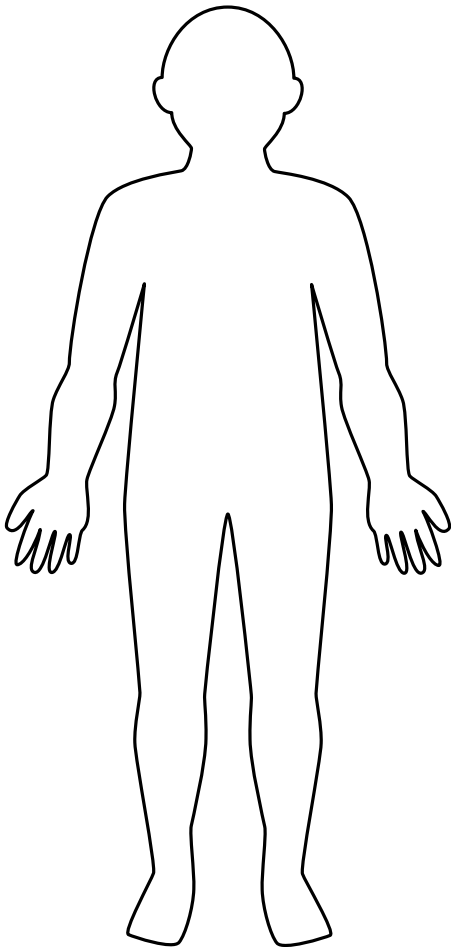
## Journal prompt

Each evening, list three or five things that gave you pleasure that day.

# Where do you feel sensation?

This activity invites you to investigate your experiences of contentment and excitement.

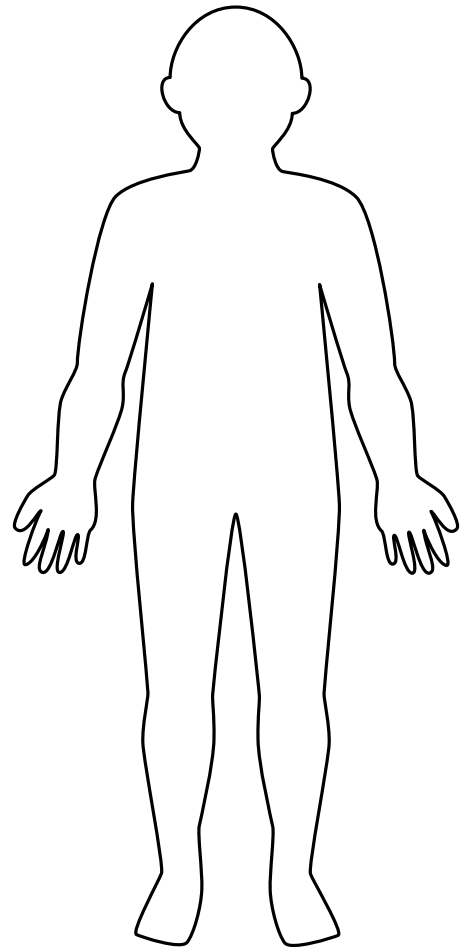
**Note:** If drawing or mapping your body feels uncomfortable, you can also describe these sensations in words, use abstract shapes for your body, or skip this activity entirely.



## Body Map: Contentment

Imagine or remember **contented** good feelings and notice your body responses.

- What sensations do you feel in your body? Where do you feel them?
- Do you feel certain textures, vibrations, temperatures, impulses to move?
- Try using different colours and patterns to express different kinds of sensations and emotions.



## Body Map: Excitement

For the second body map, imagine or remember **excited** good feelings and notice your body responses.

- Try to draw and map the feeling-states in your body.
- Use colors and patterns to record body temperature, pressure, vibration, and sensation.

How familiar, or unfamiliar, are you with these feelings? How are they similar and different?

# Exploring desire

Once you have started exploring experiences of pleasure, it can also be helpful to explore desires.

Here is one way to identify, savour, and explore some of your own desires.

## Step 1: List your desires

Set a timer for three minutes, and try to list twenty pleasurable things you would like to do someday.

- **Tip:** If a certain desire is strong for you, you can list it twenty times!

## Step 2: Imagine in detail

Select one of these desires, and take time to imagine it in detail.

- What will you be doing?
- Where will you be?
- If you're with others, who are they?
- What is the time, temperature and texture of the event?
- What do you smell?
- What do you hear?
- What do you see?
- What do you feel in your body?

Savour the scenario in your mind. Don't ask why you want this; focus instead on what, where, who, when and how.

## Step 3: Research your desire

Select a desire you have—the same one, or a different one—and try to learn more.

- Are there images, books, films, websites, workshops, community groups, or other resources about the topic of your desire?
- Take your desire seriously enough to spend time researching it.

**Remember:** Exploring desire is about discovery, not obligation. You do not have to pursue every desire you identify.