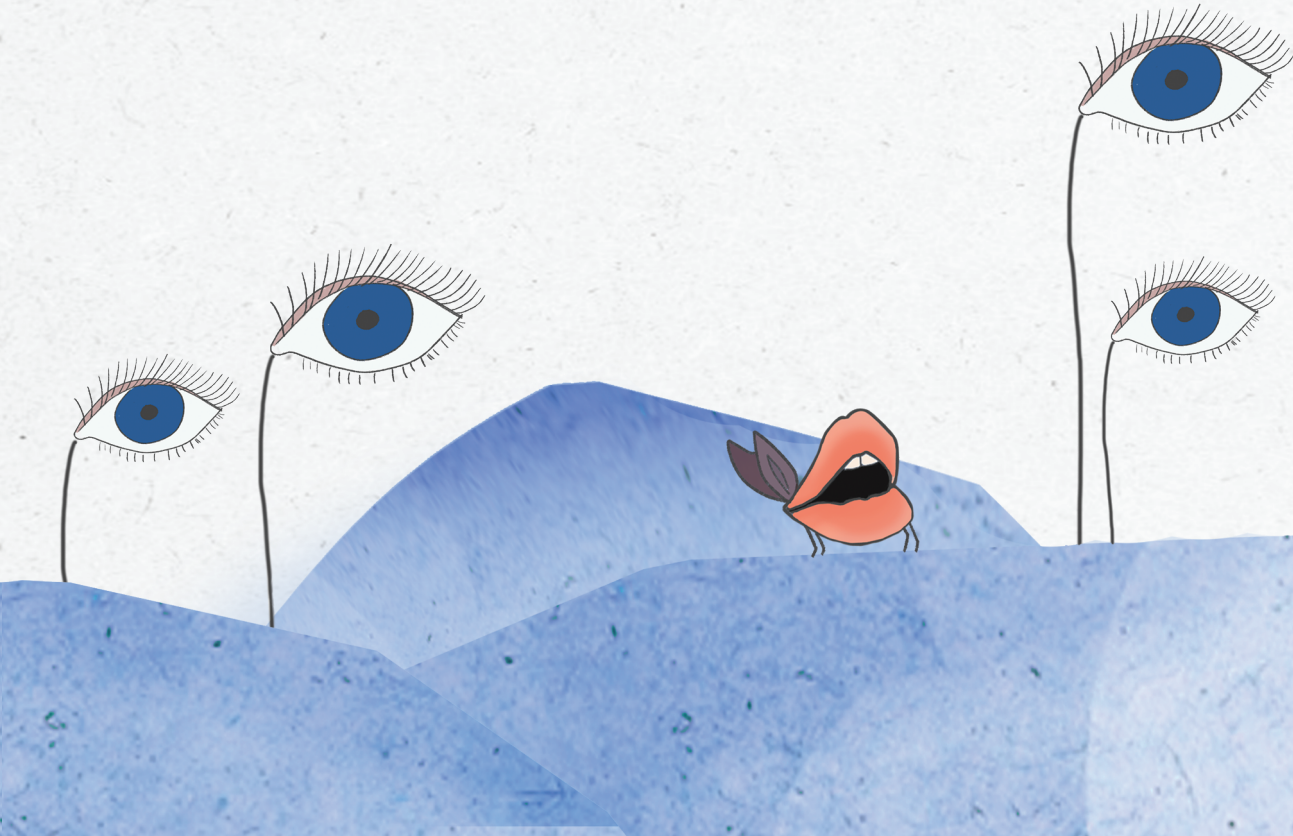


SENSORIAL AWARENESS



Sensorial awareness benefits

pleasure in simple activities
wonder and gratitude

less
reactivity

curiosity and
patience

responsiveness

being present

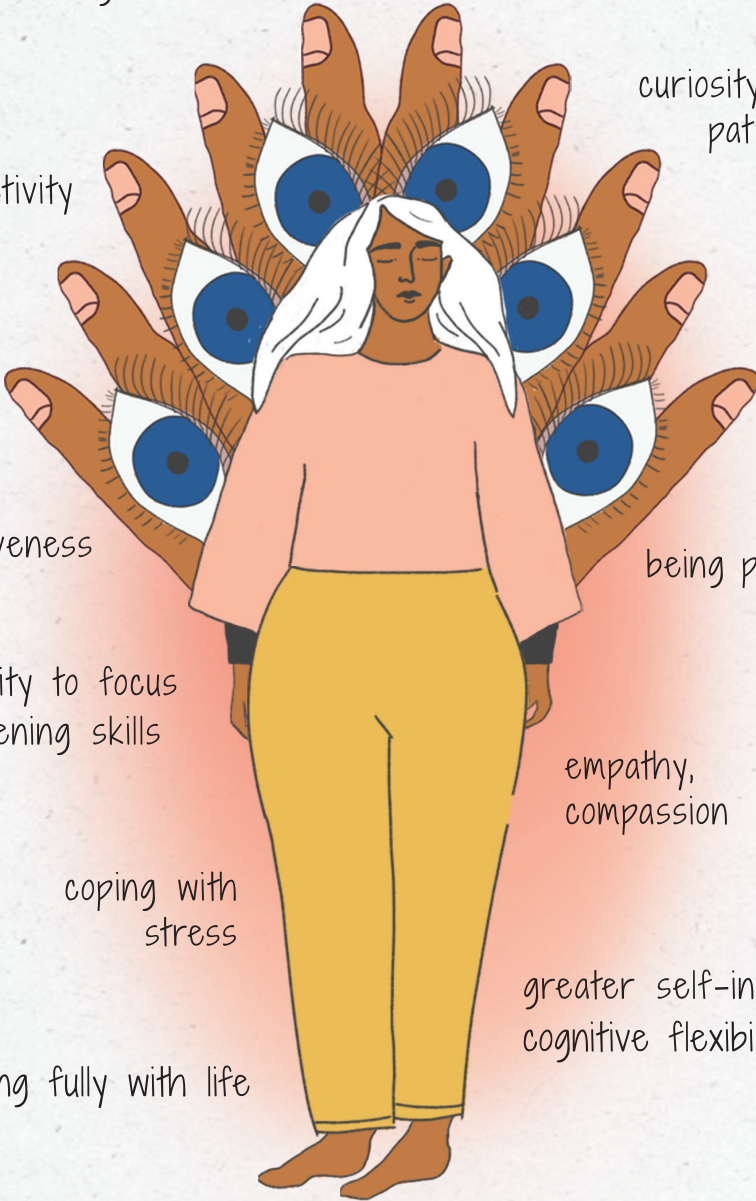
ability to focus
listening skills

empathy,
compassion

coping with
stress

greater self-insight
cognitive flexibility

engaging fully with life



Why sensorial awareness?

Through drought and recurring bushfires, our five senses are highly stimulated. Sensory awareness (turning our attention to what we see, smell, taste, feel and hear) helps soothing our eco-anxiety.

Our brain cells form a network that is fired and wired together in response to our sensory experiences. Repetitive negative actions can engrave unconscious habits and harmful reactivity in our brain - like well-trodden paths. By practicing awareness, we can create new pathways towards our well-being. Sensorial awareness activities give us the opportunity to pause and be present within ourselves. By becoming conscious of our patterns, we can gain power to change them.

In today's society, our senses are constantly bombarded with information. Saturated with images and sounds - especially through our constant interaction with digital screens - our senses can become tired. To give them some rest, it is crucial to become aware of our senses' interactions. There is an intrinsic connection between our parasympathetic nervous system (our rest and digest system) and our senses. This can be noted in the effect lowering and subsequently heightening our senses can have onto our mental health and overall well-being.

Sensorial awareness and yoga

In the Yoga tradition, withdrawal of the senses is called Pratyahara, or "gaining mastery over external influences." It is one of the eight limbs of yoga as defined by the sage Patanjali in the ancient text of the Yoga Sutras. This eight fold path of physical, mental and spiritual observances and practices was developed to attain enlightenment. Through this practice, our attention is drawn inward, blocking what we sense from the outside world. This allows our internal environment to become alive. It has been compared to a turtle withdrawing into

its shell: the turtle's shell represents the mind, and its limbs are the senses. This is the practice of consciously becoming aware of the sensations that are internalised through our touch, taste, smell, sight and smell organs. When we identify and isolate these sensations we distance ourselves from suffering, and find stillness in our minds.



This is particularly good when we are stressed, (eco-) anxious or suffer from PTSD. Withdrawal of the senses allows us to rest the senses, calm the mind and become aware of the present moment.

There are many ways we can practice Pratyahara. The most common and accessible one is to bring our attention to our breath. Observing it without trying to control it. We can also close our eyes while doing this, to increase the concentration of energy going inwards. Pratyahara is not about withdrawing or limiting our experiences in the world, it is a practice that helps us restore our energy levels by becoming aware of the connection between our external and internal realities.

Meditative Drawing

There is no ideal way of how we should sense. Each person perceives the world differently, and each experience is valid. The following activities will encourage you to become fully attentive to what you experience 'now'. This is the open gate to the human experience and understanding ourselves fully. Through direct sensory experience, find out what your own unique relation to the world is.

Materials needed:
natural elements at reach such as eucalyptus leaves, wood, orange, flowers, piece of bark, seeds, etc. pencil or pen

Touch

Close your eyes, with both hands, feel the weight of the element. Is it heavy or light, warm or cold? What about its texture? Is it rugged? Smooth? Hold it for a few seconds, are sensations changing? Just notice.

Now grab a pencil or a pen and with a continuous line (that is, without lifting your pen), draw what you touch and feel. Without thinking about its shape or representing it as you know it in your mind, play with drawing the different textures, the different layers, skins, veils, between your fingertips and the natural elements. Remember, there is no right or wrong to your drawing - just let yourself express through the pen, without self-judgement.

Be the silent observer of the heightening of your touch sense. Experience thoughts, physical sensations and emotions as they come and go, without manipulating, resisting or judging them in any way.

In your own time, draw a different element solely focusing on the touch sensation. Draw on a new page or work towards a layered composition.



Hearing

Sit comfortably and take a moment to feel the space around you. Become aware of all the points of contact between your body and where you sit.

Bring your attention to your ears. Notice the farthest sounds outside the room you are in. Can you hear birds chirping, people talking, music or cars passing by? Observe and listen to each sound, then bring your attention to the room you are in. Perceive the sounds as you bring your awareness inward. Gradually shift your attention. Hear the subtle sounds of your own body. Stay in complete stillness and notice if you can hear your own breath, feeling the cool air through your nose on the inhale and the warm breath on the exhale. Listen to this flow and perhaps also hear your heartbeat. Again, just notice. Be curious, like a child exploring a new environment.

In silence, take some notes of the experience.

Sight

Close your eyes and 'look through' your eyelids. What colour and shape do you see? Stay with these for a few breaths. Then gently open your eyes, and softly gaze at the tip of your nose. Feel the sensation around your eyes and behind your eyes. After a moment, look forward, feel the tension around your eyes releasing. As the sensation faints, take notice of your peripheral vision. Notice how it disappears as soon as you blink. Repeat the experiment a few times, slowly.

Quietly observe the different stages of vision, without judging or mentally commenting. There is no right or wrong, this is your experience at this moment, that is just what it is.

In your own time, draw the different qualities of sight you have experienced. Additionally, you can also give your drawing a two word title. Whatever comes up in the moment is right.



Taste

Slowly, drink a glass of water. Observe the sensation of the glass on your lips. Is it cold and hard? Is it smooth and pleasant? Sip after sip, discover the taste of 'this' water. What are the feelings on your tongue, your gums, the inside of your cheeks? Then focus your attention on the internal sensations, how it feels in the throat and the digestive system.

Letting go of any judgement or mental comment, observe the course the water takes, from the glass to your stomach.

When you are ready, draw an abstract symbol to represent each stage of your experience.

Smell

Grab a bunch of eucalyptus leaves, a lemon, a flower or a piece of wood. How subtle or strong is the perfume? Is your natural response to be you surprised or did you expect it? Crunch the leaves in your hand, plant your nails in the lemon... Breathe it in for a little while until your smell sense is saturated.

Observe silently the fluctuation of your experience without putting any labels on it, be the silent observer.

Choose a colour that represents best your experience and write a number according to the intensity of your experience (1 being faint, and 9 being overwhelming).

Colour in the number partially or fully, depending on how present you feel now.



Journaling

Write in your journal how you wish to plan your creative sensorial awareness journey. Start with planning just a few days and experiment with it. This will give you the opportunity to see what works and what does not. Adjust as you see fit and include other activities from this guide if you feel the need.

When planning, consider the following prompts:

- How to use sensorial awareness activities to help acknowledge the rising emotions or thoughts when you experience eco-anxiety?
- What opportunities is there during the day to cultivate moments of deep sensorial awareness? (I.e. when taking a shower, washing your hands, walking up the stairs, while cooking, sitting in a car, in a waiting room, etc.).
- After identifying situations or locations that trigger eco-anxiety, work out which sensorial awareness activity can help coming back in the present moment?
- How to use sensorial awareness at work and at home with your family? Are there collective tasks that could be transformed into a shared moment of stillness?

Activity for Children

Materials needed:
Wind, quiet and space to move (barefoot if safe)
This is an outdoor physical expression activity

Activity

This activity draws on the observation of the natural world and the perception of our internal sensations. It starts by observing objects in the distance and slowly bringing the attention back to the body.

The activity takes place quietly, with only little talking.



Step 1 - Cloud drifting

Point out how peaceful and steadily the clouds are drifting in the wind. Invite the children to move at the same pace, mimicking with their whole body how the clouds unravel, in slow motion.

Step 2 - Tree whispering

Now the children look at the trees and observe how the wind makes the branches and leaves dance. They replicate what they see and hear.

Step 3 - Bird call

Listening to the birds (or the river nearby, the insects, the breeze in the tree leaves, etc), children find the natural rhythm in their call and let their body move on that tempo.

Step 4 - Wind dance

Guided by the sensation of the wind on their body, children play and dance with it, letting it roll from one arm to another.