

# Somatic and Visceral Encyclopedia Article

## Somatic and Visceral

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# Contents

[Somatic and Visceral Encyclopedia Article.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Somatic and Visceral.....3](#)

# Somatic and Visceral

Somatic and visceral are terms often applied to anatomical processes. In the strictest sense, somatic processes are those that pertain to body general body structure. The large interior **organs** located in the major body cavities (e.g., **heart, liver, lungs**) are referred to as the viscous and the organs described as visceral organs.

For example, there are visceral and somatic sensory tracts in nerve pathways, and sensory **neurons** can be divided into somatic or visceral receptors.

**Pain** is often divided into somatic or visceral pain (there is also a third type of pain termed neuropathic pain). Somatic pain results from stimulation of pain receptors in musculoskeletal or cutaneous **tissue** (skin and associated integumentary system structures). In contrast, visceral pain resulted from the stimulation of pain receptors in the visceral organs situated in the thoracic or abdominal cavities.

The types of pain differ not only in origin, but also in quality. Musculoskeletal somatic pain is often described as a dull or aching pain that can be localized as emanating from a particular structure. Cutaneous somatic pain is often a burning or pricking sensation localized to a particular surface area of the body. In contrast, visceral pain is often described as deep, pressure or squeezing related sensation that seems to emanate from several areas or as a pain diffuse (spread) over the thoracic, abdominal, or pelvic areas.

Physiologists often study how processes differ between somatic and visceral structures. For example, physiologists may study the conduction of action potentials and differences in the contractile mechanisms of **skeletal muscle** versus visceral **smooth muscle**.