



Sensory Symptoms Checklist: Babies and Toddlers

The following checklist is not a diagnostic tool; rather, it is an indicator of sensory over- or under-responsiveness. The purpose of this tool is to assist in developing an appropriate treatment plan and/or sensory diet for an individual with sensory modulation difficulties.

Remember: It is normal for all people to be sensitive to certain sensations. Sensory modulation becomes a disorder only when it negatively impacts a person's life (i.e., ability to pay attention, learn, socialize, relax).

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior. Sensory Seeking is a form of under-responsiveness, but these individuals seek intense sensation to compensate for the under-responsiveness of their nervous systems. In general, under-responders tend to be more passive and sedentary than the sensory-seekers, but they still share many symptoms.

Depending on the age of your child, many symptoms will not be applicable. Just check the symptoms you observe at this stage of development and leave others blank.

TACTILE (TOUCH)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- cries/arches back when held/cuddled
- difficulty transitioning to solid foods
- avoids messy play including
- finger-painting and Play-Doh
- dislikes nail-trimming/hair-cutting/
hair-brushing/tooth-brushing
- limited food preferences, sensitive to
food textures
- cries/fusses during diaper change
- distressed by baths
- startles easily when touched
unexpectedly
- over-reacts to minor injuries or
mosquito bites
- difficulty transitioning to solid foods

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- always touching others*
- prefers to be without clothes and
barefoot*
- doesn't seem to notice messy hands or
face (beyond 12 months)
- seems unaware of light touch
- may stuff too much food in mouth*
- doesn't seem to notice cuts and
scrapes, doesn't mind shots
- drools, doesn't notice runny nose or
food on face (beyond 18 months)
- after 18 months, doesn't appear to
notice wet/soiled diaper
- delayed fine motor skills

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.



PROPRIOCEPTIVE (PRESSURE ON MUSCLES AND JOINTS)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

Since proprioceptive input is always helpful to the nervous system, we do not see **over-responsivity** in this category.

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- only sleeps when held or requires positioning aids/swing/bouncy seat
- loves jumping, climbing, wrestling, and crashing activities*
- walks on toes*, or walks heavily
- difficulty with fine motor tasks
- prefers crunchy and chewy foods*
- sucks thumb or fingers, chews on clothes and toys (beyond 18 months)
- very attached to pacifier (beyond 1 year)
- grinds teeth
- loves tight hugs and squishing activities or positions*
- chooses thick or heavy blankets
- self-injurious behaviors: pinching, biting, head banging*

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

VESTIBULAR (MOVEMENT)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- dislikes being held away from adult's body or tossed in air, may be clingy
- avoids swings, slides, anything that requires feet to be off the ground
- fearful of escalators, elevators, and all heights
- resists leaning back for hair washing or floating on back in pool
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*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- needs to be rocked a lot; is happiest in stroller, swing, bouncer*
- dislikes sedentary tasks*
- is in constant motion, loves spinning, swinging, being upside down*
- may have low muscle tone (muscles and joints seem too soft and floppy)
- "W" sitting on floor, slumps, leans in chair
- loves spinning
- rocks self or moves head back and forth while sitting*

INTEROCEPTION (INTERNAL SENSATIONS)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- seems to have a low pain tolerance
- displays significant distress when cold after bath or after stepping outside on hot day
- frequent complaints of various aches and pains

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- difficult to toilet-train
- apparent lack of hunger/thirst
- high pain tolerance or shows inappropriate response to pain
- difficulty falling asleep/staying asleep
- doesn't seem aware of symptoms of illness such as sore throat or nausea

AUDITORY (SOUND)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- startles easily, cries with vacuum, hair-dryers, toilet flushing
- dislikes noisy places
- easily distracted and bothered by background noises
- cries, covers ears with loud or unexpected sounds
- asks others to be quiet

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- may not consistently respond to name (rule out hearing loss)
- prefers TV and music to be loud*
- often doesn't notice background noises
- makes own sounds frequently, enjoys silly sounds of others*
- says "What?" frequently even though hearing is intact
- may appear oblivious to some sounds, has difficulty locating sound
- may use self-talk to get through a task

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

VISUAL

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- bothered by bright lights, sun
- dislikes visually busy places (stores, playgrounds, cluttered rooms)
- avoids eye contact
- prefers dim lighting, shade
- rubs eyes a lot

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- loves shiny, spinning or moving objects*
- difficulty with eye-hand coordination tasks (catching a ball, stringing beads)
- loves action-packed, colorful TV shows and electronic games*

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.



GUSTATORY AND OLFACTORY (TASTE AND SMELL)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- talks about smell a lot, notices odors others don't notice
- plugs nose, avoids places with strong smells (some restaurants)
- dislikes new foods, may have very limited food preferences

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- smells and licks inedible objects such as toys and Play-Doh*
- likes strong odors such as perfume, cleaning products, and gasoline*
- prefers strongly flavored foods: spicy, salty, bitter, sour, sweet*

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

AFFECT

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- generally fussy, irritable
- very particular; seems to be a certain way things have to be done
- difficulty self-soothing

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- generally happy, laid back
- seems tuned out frequently
- constantly on the go at an early age; hard to manage physically

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.