



## Sensory Symptoms Checklist: Home Version

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).

The asterisk (\*) 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.

### TACTILE (TOUCH)

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#### Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- avoids affectionate touch
- bothered by seams in clothing, tags, waistbands, etc.
- 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
- excessively ticklish
- avoids standing close to others
- startles easily when touched unexpectedly
- overreacts to minor injuries or mosquito bites

#### Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- always touching others\*
- as a young child, may prefer to be without clothes and barefoot
- doesn't seem to notice messy hands or face
- touches everything, brings objects and toys to mouth frequently\*
- may stuff too much food in mouth
- seems unaware of light touch
- doesn't seem to notice cuts and scrapes, doesn't mind shots
- drools, doesn't wipe runny nose
- unintentionally rough on pets or other kids
- craves intense flavors—salty, sweet, sour, spicy, etc.\*
- difficulty with fine motor tasks

\*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

- 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
- grinds teeth, cracks knuckles\*
- loves tight hugs and “squishing” activities or positions\*
- chooses thick or heavy blankets
- self-abusive behaviors—pinching, biting, head-banging\*
- prefers tight-fitting clothes or may wear a snug jacket constantly\*
- uses too much or too little force on objects (e.g., juice boxes, crayons)

## VESTIBULAR (MOVEMENT)

### Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- as a baby, 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
- gets motion sick easily
- dislikes leaning back for hair- washing or floating on back in pool

### Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- as a baby, 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, loves amusement park rides, is a “thrill-seeker”\*
- rocks self or moves head back and forth while sitting\*

\*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

## 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 a hot day
- extreme fear of medical procedures
- 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 dress appropriately for weather
- doesn't seem aware of symptoms of illness such as sore throat or nausea

## AUDITORY (SOUND)

### Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- as a baby, 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

## 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, may get headaches from reading

### Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- loves shiny, spinning or moving objects\*
- difficulty with eye-hand coordination tasks (catching a ball, stringing beads, tracing and writing)
- loves action-packed, colorful TV shows and electronic games\*
- difficulty distinguishing between similar letters and shapes
- difficulty with visual tracking, may lose place frequently while reading

\*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.



## GUSTATORY AND OLFACTORY (TASTE AND SMELL)

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### 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.