

Sensory Symptoms Checklist

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)

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)

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

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

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*

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)

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.