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 that it is normal for all people to be sensitive to certain sensations. Sensory modulation becomes a disorder only when it is negatively impacting 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 make up for the under-responsiveness of their nervous systems. The general under-responders tend to be more passive and sedentary than the sensory-seekers, but 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 mos)
- 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
PROPrioceptive (Pressure on Muscles and JOints)

Since proprioceptive input is always helpful to the nervous system, we do not see over-Responsiveness 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 yr)
- grinds teeth
- loves tight hugs and “squishing” activities or positions*
- chooses thick or heavy blankets
- self-injurious behaviors – pinching, biting, head-banging*

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

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

### 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*

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*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior. See note at top of form.

### 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*

### 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. See note at top of form.