



Sensory Symptoms Checklist: Adolescent Version

This 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 (e.g., 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. In general, under-responders tend to be more passive and sedentary than the sensory cravers, but they still share many symptoms.

TACTILE (TOUCH)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- avoids affectionate touch
- startles with unexpected touch
- becomes distressed when others invade personal space
- requires the use of soft pencil grips
- dislikes putting on deodorant
- dislikes wearing makeup
- dislikes the feeling of sweat
- is bothered by tags and seams in clothes
- clothing does not match the weather (e.g., won't wear pants in winter)
- overly ticklish
- is uncomfortable being dirty
- becomes distressed by air blowing on skin (e.g., wind, fan)
- becomes distressed by needles and shots
- cannot tolerate lotion/sunscreen
- dislikes self-care tasks (brushing teeth, cutting nails, combing hair)
- difficulty with fine motor tasks

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- applies layers of makeup*
- enjoys being dirty*
- is unaware of dirt/food on skin
- doesn't mind needles/shots
- difficulty playing instruments
- difficulty with fine motor tasks
- does not notice light touch or scratches
- craves intense food textures*
- needs to touch something that is textured to focus on a task*
- prefers contact sports*
- wears clothes of intense textures (e.g., velvet, sequins, tights, lace)*
- enjoys messy crafting (pottery, painting)
- unaware of runny nose, watery eyes
- is always touching other people/invading personal space*

PROPRIOCEPTIVE (PRESSURE ON MUSCLES AND JOINTS; BODY AWARENESS)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

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

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- self-injurious behaviors*
- heavy walking or toe-walking*
- grinds teeth and/or cracks knuckles*
- participates in rough play or sports (football, hockey, wrestling, etc.)*
- participates in sports requiring high flexibility (gymnastics, skating, etc.)
- demonstrates poor hand-eye coordination
- falls out of chairs or walks into walls/people
- writes hard or types forcefully*
- writing is too faint to read
- poor fine motor coordination
- clicks pen to focus*
- is seen as “aggressive”
- pets animals too hard*
- enjoys hugs and physical contact*
- wraps up in blankets*
- cannot sleep without a weighted blanket*
- prefers when clothes fit tightly*
- stuffs food into mouth/eats quickly*
- breaks items unintentionally
- cannot identify objects by touch alone
- difficulty typing or writing without looking
- cannot identify location without using clues from surroundings
- gets lost easily when driving
- has difficulty giving directions
- needs to chew gum or eat crunchy snacks to focus*
- has poor balance and/or posture

VESTIBULAR (MOVEMENT)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- gets dizzy easily
- experiences motion sickness
- does not enjoy driving
- is afraid of heights
- doesn't like feet to leave the ground
- avoids going to amusement parks/riding rollercoasters
- dislikes high energy sports involving a lot of movement (roller blading, ice skating, skateboarding, dance, gymnastics, cheerleading, etc.)
- becomes distressed when head is tilted out of the upright, vertical position
- is unmotivated to change positions/can be described as lazy
- difficulty with tipping head back in the shower to wash hair

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- loves rollercoasters and swinging*
- is constantly in motion*
- can jump on a trampoline for hours*
- loves high energy sports with a lot of movement
- loves to spin*
- does not get dizzy when spinning
- has abnormal tone (low/high)
- cannot fall asleep without moving enough throughout the day
- needs alternative seating within the classroom
- requires a fidget to focus*
- fidgets a lot*
- is described to be in constant motion or on-the-go

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

INTEROCEPTION (INTERNAL SENSATIONS)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- has a low pain tolerance
- describes sensations that should not be painful as painful
- is distressed by temperature changes
- frequent complaints of “growing pains” or general aches/pains
- suffers from headaches
- frequently complains of nausea
- experiences menstrual symptoms disruptive to everyday life
- has poor tolerance of hunger/gets ‘hangry’
- constantly feels the need to urinate
- is resistant to medical procedures
- shows disordered eating behaviors

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- has a high pain tolerance
- burns mouth easily
- has difficulty distinguishing between temperatures
- has difficulty recognizing hunger cues
- over-eats and/or has difficulty recognizing fullness/satiety*
- requires food to include a lot of spices*
- does not recognize the need to go to the bathroom until it is urgent
- experiences sleep difficulties
- dresses inappropriately for the weather/temperature
- has difficulty recognizing signs of sickness

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

AUDITORY (SOUND)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- plays music at a very low volume
- cannot listen to more than one sound at once/gets distracted by competing noises
- cannot filter out sounds from different environments
- cannot focus with the A/C, radio or other quiet background noises
- startles easily with unexpected sounds
- dislikes noisy environments
- frequently asks others to be quiet/lower their voices
- becomes distressed by the sound of someone chewing or making excessive noise
- does not like common household sounds
- prefers quiet environments and spending time with smaller groups of people
- watches television on mute
- prefers watching and playing quieter sports and activities
- focuses best when seated at the front of the classroom
- has difficulty refocusing when loud noises occur when driving (horns, sirens, etc.)
- benefits from using noise-canceling headphones

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- blasts music*
- focuses best when listening to music or other noises*
- has difficulty hearing others who speak quietly
- watches television with the volume turned up*
- does not consistently respond when spoken to
- requires others to repeat themselves when speaking
- has difficulty locating sounds
- may appear oblivious to some sounds
- talks out loud to complete a task*
- doesn't notice background noises
- frequently makes noises within their environment
- enjoys loud environments*
- likes to make sounds echo*
- prefers watching and playing louder sports*
- spending time with larger groups of people*
- requires preferential seating in the classroom to pay attention
- benefits from a microphone to enhance the teacher's voice
- makes loud noises happen repeatedly*

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

VISUAL

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- bothered by bright lights
- always needs to wear sunglasses
- is affected by blue light from electronic devices/needs to wear blue light blocking glasses
- dislikes video games
 - dislikes visually busy places (e.g., grocery store, sporting events)
- becomes distressed by disorganized spaces
- avoids making eye contact
- prefers working in dim light
- cannot fall asleep unless bedroom is in total darkness (e.g., blackout curtains)
- rubs eyes a lot
- gets headaches from visual tasks
- has difficulty sorting through all the written information on walls in public places
- tilts head or rests head on arm during writing tasks

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- loves looking at bright/shiny objects*
- prefers colorful items*
- demonstrates poor hand-eye coordination and visual perception
- has difficulty visually tracking items moving throughout the environment
- has difficulty keeping place when reading
- has difficulty sorting through competing visual input
- enjoys fast paced video games*
- loves spending time in visually busy environments*
- difficulty locating an item in a busy visual environment
- does not need to wear sunglasses
- is not affected by stimulating blue light
- has difficulty playing EyeSpy games
- has difficulty recognizing road signs when driving

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.

GUSTATORY AND OLFACTORY (TASTE AND SMELL)

Symptoms of Over-Responsiveness

- talks about smells often
- notices odors that others don't
- is sensitive to perfume/cologne
- cannot tolerate conventional cleaning products
- doesn't like candles or air fresheners
- avoids places with strong smells
- cannot tolerate playing 'smelly' sports (e.g., hockey)
- has a limited food repertoire and does not like the taste/smell of certain foods
- becomes distressed by being around others who might smell
- is considered a picky eater
- sensitive to new food textures

Symptoms of Under-Responsiveness

- is unaware of some smells
- prefers strong flavors of foods*
- does not recognize body odor
- wears a lot of perfume/cologne*
- prefers when others wear perfume/cologne
- likes the smell of strong smells (e.g., soaps, gasoline, cleaning products)*
- loves candles and air fresheners*
- enjoys places with strong smells
- needs to smell things before tasting them*
- prefers chewy, crunchy, and/or hard to chew foods

*Indicates sensory-seeking behavior.