

Signs of Sensory Processing Disorder

Signs of Sensory Over-Responsivity (Hypersensitivity)

Auditory

- Frequently covers ears; especially in loud environments
- Runs away, cries, and/or covers ears with loud or unexpected sounds
- Is bothered by or distracted by background environmental sounds; i.e., lawn mower, loud cars, horns, construction, music, etc.
- Requests quiet environment; i.e., stop making noise, talking, or singing
- May be easily distracted by sounds not noticed or bothered by others such as clocks ticking, airconditioners, refrigerators, fans, etc.
- May refuse to go to events/activities where there is a lot of noise such as parties, movie theaters, parades, musical concerts etc.

Olfactory

- Tells other people (or talks about) how bad or funny they smell
- Refuses to eat certain foods because of their smell
- Is bothered by, gets sick, or has behavioral issues after the use of household cleaning products
- Notices and/or reacts negatively to smells which do not usually bother, or get noticed, by other people
- Is bothered by or gets irritated by the smell of perfumes, lotions, cologne, candles, etc.
- May decide to like/dislike a certain environment by the way it smells

Tactile

- As an infant, did/does not like to be held or cuddled; may arch back, cry, and pull away
- Becomes distressed when diaper or cloths are changed
- As a toddler may preferred/prefers to be naked and pull diapers and clothes off constantly
- Appears fearful of, or avoids standing in close proximity to other people or peers such as in groups, crowds, or lines
- Is fearful, anxious or aggressive with light or unexpected touch
- Is excessively ticklish
- May overreact to minor cuts, scrapes, and or bug bites
- Becomes distressed about having hair brushed; may be very picky about using a particular brush
- Resists friendly or affectionate touch from anyone besides parents or siblings (and sometimes them too!)
- Avoids touching certain textures of material; rough/silky/scratchy, etc.
- Becomes distressed or may refuse to walk barefoot on grass or sand
- May walk on toes only or only when barefoot and with certain surfaces
- Refuses to wear certain clothes such as clothes with rough textures, turtlenecks, jeans, hats, or belts, etc.; distressed by seams in socks and may refuse to wear them

- Avoids or dislikes "messy play", i.e., sand, mud, water, glue, Playdoh, slime, etc.
- Is a picky eater, only eating certain tastes and textures; mixed textures tend to be avoided as well as hot or cold foods; resists trying new foods
- Becomes distressed when having face washed
- Resists brushing teeth and is extremely fearful of the dentist

Taste

- Picky eater; often with extreme food preferences; i.e., soft foods, crunchy foods, hot food, cold food, etc.
- May only eat "soft" or pureed foods past 24 months of age
- Has difficulty with sucking, chewing, and swallowing
- Avoids seasoned, spicy, sweet, sour or salty foods; prefers bland foods
- Extreme resistance to trying new/different foods
- Easily gags with textured foods
- Dislikes or complains about toothpaste and mouthwash
- Extreme resistance or fear of going to the dentist or having dental work done

Visual

- Avoids eye contact
- Is easily distracted by other visual stimuli in the room; i.e., movement, decorations, toys, windows, etc.
- Rubs eyes, has watery eyes, or gets headaches after reading, writing, computer use or watching TV
- Is sensitive to bright lights; will squint, cover eyes, cry and/or get headaches from the light
- Will have difficulty in bright colorful rooms or a dimly lit room
- Has difficulty keeping eyes focused on task/activity he/she is working on for an appropriate amount of time

Vestibular

- Gets motion sickness often or easily, i.e.; cars, elevators, head movement
- May have disliked being placed on stomach as an infant
- As an infant, may never have liked baby swings or jumpers
- Dislikes or is fearful of walking on uneven surfaces or going up and down stairs
- Avoids/dislikes playground equipment; i.e., swings, ladders, slides, or merry-go-rounds
- Does not like activities where feet leave/don't touch the ground
- Prefers sedentary tasks
- Does not like spinning or fast movements; avoids rapid or rotating movements
- Moves slowly and cautiously, avoids taking risks, and may appear "wimpy"
- Does not like head movement; especially in extension, i.e., washing hair
- Avoids/dislikes elevators and escalators
- Afraid of heights, even the height of a curb or step
- Has difficulty with or is fearful of activities that require balance
- Loses balance easily
- May be fearful of, and have difficulty riding a bike, jumping, hopping, skipping or balancing on one foot (especially if eyes are closed)

Proprioception

- Has low muscle tone; limp, "floppy" body
- Fatigues easily
- May have difficulty turning doorknobs, handles, opening and closing items
- May have never crawled as an baby
- Has poor body positional awareness; bumps into things, knocks things over, trips, and/or appears clumsy
- Has poor gross motor skills; jumping, catching a ball, jumping jacks, climbing a ladder etc.
- Poor fine motor skills; difficulty using "tools", such as pencils, silverware, combs, scissors etc.
- Does not establish hand dominance by 4-5 year old; may appear ambidextrous, frequently switching hands for throwing, coloring, cutting, writing etc.
- Has difficulty learning exercise or dance steps

Signs of Sensory Under-Responsivity (Hyposensitive)

Auditory

- Had little or no vocalizing or babbling as an infant
- Often speaks in a loud voice and/or excessively
- Likes excessively loud music, games, or TV
- Does not respond to or had difficulty with verbal cues or to name being called
- Has difficulty understanding or remembering what was said
- Needs instructions repeated often, or will say, "What?" frequently
- Talks self through a task, often out loud
- Appears oblivious to certain sounds
- Often disoriented/confused about where a sound is coming from

Olfactory

- Fails to notice or ignores noxious odors
- Excessively smells new objects, toys, people
- Has difficulty discriminating unpleasant odors
- May drink or eat things that are harmful/poisonous because they do not notice the noxious smell
- Unable to identify smells from scratch 'n sniff stickers

Tactile

- May crave touch, needs to touch everything and everyone
- May be self-abusive; pinching, biting, cutting, or head banging
- Has a high pain tolerance
- Likes to put objects in their mouth
- Seeks out surfaces and textures that provide strong tactile feedback
- Often is not aware of being touched/bumped unless done with extreme force or intensity
- Often injures self; burns, cuts, bruises, etc., because harmful act does not register
- May not be aware that hands or face are dirty or feel his/her nose running
- Frequently and unknowingly hurts other children or pets while playing
- Repeatedly touches surfaces or objects that are soothing (i.e., blanket)
- Seeks out messy play

Taste

- May eat inedible objects such as dirt, chalk, crayons (Pica)
- Prefers foods with intense flavor; i.e., excessively spicy, sweet, sour, or salty
- Frequently chews on hair, shirt, or fingers
- Constantly puts objects in mouth; even past the toddler years
- Likes brushing teeth/vibrating toothbrushes and even trips to the dentist

Visual

- Complains about "seeing double"
- Writes at a slant (up or down hill) on a page
- Difficulty copying
- Fatigues easily with reading, writing, drawing, video games, etc.
- Often loses their place while reading or doing math problems
- Difficulty finding differences in pictures, words, symbols, or objects
- Has a hard time seeing the "big picture"; i.e., focuses on the details or patterns within the picture
- Difficulty with following and tracking objects with eyes
- Difficulty judging spatial relationships in the environment; i.e., bumps into objects/people or missteps on curbs and stairs
- Has difficulty telling the difference between similar printed letters or figures; i.e., p & q, b & d, + and x, or square and rectangle
- Makes reversals in words or letters when copying, or reads words backwards; i.e., "was" for "saw" and "no" for "on" after first grade

Vestibular

- Appears to be in constant motion, can't seem to sit still
- Loves to swing or spin; can do for long periods
- Craves fast movement; always running, jumping, hopping etc. instead of walking
- Loves fast moving and spinning rides at amusement parks
- When sitting must rock, shakes legs, or move head
- Likes jumping on furniture, trampolines, spinning in a swivel chair, or getting into upside down positions
- Tends to be a "thrill-seeker"; dangerous at times

Proprioception

- Seeks out jumping, bumping, and crashing activities; loves "roughhousing" and tackling/wrestling
- Kicks feet on floor or chair while sitting at desk/table
- Prefers tight clothing; likes heavy blankets
- Likes to be squeezed/hugged tightly
- Clenches or grinds teeth
- Likes to push, pinch, bump or hit others
- Likes to chew on things such as lip, straws, pencils, shirt collar/sleeve, etc
- Loves jumping off high structures/furniture
- Frequently falls on floor intentionally