

Signs of Sensory Over-Responsivity (Hypersensitivity)

Auditory

- Frequently covers ears, especially in loud environments.
- Runs away, cries, or covers ears with loud or unexpected sounds.
- Is bothered by or distracted by background environmental sounds.
- Requests quiet environment.
- Easily distracted by sounds not noticed or bothered by others.
- Refuses to go to activities where there is a lot of noise.

Taste

- Picky eater, often with extreme food preferences – 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 foods.
- Easily gags with textured foods.
- Complains about toothpaste and mouthwash.
- Extreme resistance or fear of going to the dentist.

Tactile

- As an infant, does not like to be held or cuddled; arches back, pulls away.
- Becomes distressed when diaper or clothes are changed.
- As a toddler, prefers to be naked; pulls diapers and clothes off constantly.
- Appears fearful standing in close proximity to others.
- Is fearful, anxious or aggressive with light or unexpected touch.
- Is excessively ticklish.
- Overreacts to minor cuts, bug bites.
- Becomes distressed about having hair brushed; insists on 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.
- Refuses to wear clothes with rough textures such as turtlenecks, jeans, hats, or belts; distressed by seams in socks and may refuse to wear them.
- Dislikes “messy play” – 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.
- Distressed when having face washed.
- Resists brushing teeth and is extremely fearful of the dentist.



Olfactory

- Tells others how bad/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 are not noticed by others.
- Irritated by the smell of perfumes, lotions, cologne, candles.
- Likes/dislikes an environment by the way it smells.

Vestibular

- Gets motion sickness often or easily – cars, elevators, head movement.
- May have disliked being placed on stomach as an infant.
- Disliked baby swings/jumpers.
- Dislikes or is fearful of walking on uneven surfaces or going up/down stairs.
- Dislikes playground equipment.
- Does not like activities where feet leave/don't touch the ground.
- Prefers sedentary tasks.
- Dislikes spinning or fast movements.
- Moves slowly and cautiously, avoids taking risks, and may appear "wimpy."
- Dislikes head movement, especially in extension, i.e. washing hair.
- Dislikes elevators and escalators.
- Afraid of heights, even the height of a curb or step.
- Is fearful of activities that require balance; loses balance easily.
- Difficulty riding a bike, jumping, hopping, skipping or balancing on one foot (especially if eyes are closed).

Visual

- Avoids eye contact.
- Easily distracted by visual stimuli – toys, movement, decorations, windows, etc.
- Rubs eyes, has watery eyes, or gets headaches after reading, writing, computer use or watching TV.
- Sensitive to bright lights; squints, cover eyes, cries, gets headaches from light.
- Will have difficulty in bright colorful rooms or a dimly lit room.
- Has difficulty keeping eyes focused on a task/activity for an appropriate amount of time.

Proprioception

- Has low muscle tone, limp/floppy body.
- Fatigues easily.
- Has difficulty turning doorknobs, handles, opening and closing items.
- May have never crawled as a baby.
- Has poor body positional awareness – bumps into things, knocks things over, trips, appears clumsy.
- 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.