Adolescent and Adult Sensory Processing Checklist

For you to fill out and bring to our work together

Name		**Date of birth**	
Date completed		**Email**	

How to fill this out. Read each item and rate how often it is true for you, from 0 to 5, where **0 = never** and **5 = always**. Go with your first sense of it; there are no right answers. Leave an item blank only if it doesn't apply to your life at all.

What this checklist is, and isn't. Your senses shape how you move through every day, and everyone's nervous system is wired a little differently. Most people will mark many of these items, since lots of them are ordinary preferences. This checklist is a self-report, not a diagnosis. It helps us see which senses carry the most load for you, how strongly, and how much they shape your work, rest and play. If your answers point to sensory challenges that really get in the way of daily life, an occupational therapist experienced with adults can offer a full evaluation.

Source: *Adapted from the Adult Sensory Processing Disorder Checklist, sensory-processing-disorder.com/adult-SPD-checklist.html*

Sensory Modulation

49 items · 0 = never, 5 = always

0–5	Item
	bothered by clothes; certain materials, tags, seams, pantyhose, ties, belts, turtlenecks, have to wear shorts, skirts, or pants exclusively, etc.
	bothered by "light touch"; someone lightly touching/rubbing your hand, face, leg or back
	excessively ticklish
	distressed by others touching you; would rather be the "toucher" than the "touchee", difficulty "snuggling" with your partner
	have to fidget and "fiddle" with things all the time; change in your pocket, your keys, a pen/pencil, paper clip, rubber band, ANYTHING within reach
	often touch and twist your own hair
	very sensitive to pain, especially as compared to others
	don't seem to notice pain; get shots/cuts/bruises and hardly feel a thing
	dislike the feeling of showers or getting splashed
	difficulty going to the beach; the sand blowing on your skin or getting on your body

0–5	Item
	avoid touching anything “messy”; if you do, you have to go wash your hands right away and/or only touch it with your fingertips
	cannot wear new or “stiff” clothes that have not been washed or soaked in fabric softener
	hate to be barefoot or hate to wear shoes and/or socks
	frequently get carsick, air sick, motion sick
	a thrill seeker; love fast and/or dangerous rides, leisure activities, and sports
	difficulty riding on elevators, escalators, or moving sidewalks
	avoid amusement park rides that spin or go upside down
	seek out fast, spinning, and/or upside-down carnival rides
	often rock or sway your body back and forth while seated or standing still
	frequently tip your chair on back two legs
	restless when sitting through a lecture, presentation, or movie
	constantly chew on ends of pens and pencils
	smoke cigarettes or vape
	difficulty eating foods with mixed textures, or one particular texture
	prefer foods with very strong tastes and flavors
	prefer very bland foods, dislike anything spicy
	have an eating disorder or strong sensitivities around food
	constantly biting nails or fingers
	bites lips or inside of cheeks
	frequently shake your leg while sitting or falling asleep
	love to sleep with multiple or heavy blankets on top of you
	seek out crashing and “squishing” activities
	crack your knuckles often
	love crunchy foods (popcorn, carrots, chips, nuts, pretzels, etc.)
	frequently have gum or hard candy in your mouth
	have an “endless” supply of air fresheners, scented candles, odor masking sprays, etc.
	become nauseated or gag from certain cooking, cleaning, perfume, public restroom, or bodily odors

0–5	Item
	identify objects by smell, have to smell everything, judge whether you like something or someone by smell
	become overstimulated or overaroused when people come to the house or in crowded places
	very high or very low energy level
	avoid crowds and plan errands at times when there will be fewer people
	overly excited or aroused in group settings
	hide or disappear when guests come over
	reach for alcohol or other substances to take the edge off
	drink excessive amounts of coffee or caffeinated beverages
	notice and are bothered by noises other people don’t seem to mind: clocks, refrigerators, fans, people talking, outdoor construction, etc.
	sensitive to loud sounds or commotion
	easily distracted by auditory or visual stimuli
	cannot attend certain public events or places due to excessive noise
	Sensory Modulation subtotal: _____ of 245

Sensory Discrimination

39 items · 0 = never, 5 = always

0–5	Item
	can’t identify objects by feel if your eyes are closed
	difficulty finding things in your purse or pocket without looking
	don’t seem to notice if your hands or face are dirty
	bothered by hands or face being dirty
	love to touch and be touched, have to touch everything
	have a hard time feeling where a bug has bitten you or whether you are being bitten
	difficulty heating food to the correct temperature, feeling if it is too hot or too cold
	difficulty locating items in a cupboard, drawer, in your closet, or on a grocery shelf
	difficulty with recognizing/interpreting/following traffic signs

0–5	Item
	difficulty judging distances about where your car is in relation to other cars, in parking spaces, or near a curb (parallel parking is a challenge)
	difficulty merging into oncoming traffic on road, rotary, or highway
	get disoriented and/or lost easily in stores, buildings, hiking, etc.
	can’t sleep if the room isn’t completely dark
	fearful of heights
	difficulty concentrating on or watching a movie/tv show when there is background noise or distractions
	difficulty remembering or understanding what is said to you
	difficulty following directions if given two or three at one time
	cannot complete focused tasks when there is noise
	sensitive to, or overreact to, to sirens, dogs barking, vacuum cleaners, blenders, or other sudden/loud sounds
	talk too loudly or too softly
	low energy, hard to get going, slow to feel motivated
	become engrossed in one single activity for a long time and seem to tune out the rest of the environment
	spend hours at a time on fantasy or video games and activities
	great difficulty settling your body down for sleep or waking up in the morning (sleeping through the alarm, for example)
	difficulty licking an ice cream cone neatly
	difficulty with speech and pronunciation
	bump into things frequently
	often push too hard on objects, accidentally breaking them
	difficulty judging how much pressure to apply when doing tasks or picking something up
	difficulty identifying which key on your ring belongs to what
	often reverse numbers and letters or backwards
	difficulty telling time on an analogue clock
	difficulty reading and understanding a map, bus schedule, directions
	difficulty organizing and grouping things by categories, similarities, and/or differences

0–5	Item
	can’t seem to find words in word search puzzles
	unable to identify foods that have gone bad by smell
	difficulty being able to smell dangerous smells, i.e., smoke, noxious/hazardous solvents
	difficulty being able to smell when something is burning on the stove or in the oven
	difficulty distinguishing different tastes and/or flavors of food and/or drink items
	Sensory Discrimination subtotal: _____ of 195

Sensory-Based Motor Skills

21 items · 0 = never, 5 = always

0–5	Item
	difficulty learning to ride a bike or other “moving” equipment
	feel clumsy, uncoordinated, and accident prone
	difficulty walking on uneven surfaces
	difficulty with fine motor tasks such as buttoning, zipping, tying, knitting, sewing, playing games with small parts, closing zip-top bags
	confuse right and left sides
	prefer sedentary tasks, avoiding sports or physical activities
	difficulty with handwriting; hard to read, takes a long time to write
	frequently bump into people and things
	easily tired with physical tasks
	frequently miss when putting objects on a table
	a messy eater, difficulty with eating utensils, spills and drops food
	knock drinks or other things over when reaching for them
	frequently drop items
	have to talk yourself through tasks
	hum or make sounds while concentrating on a task
	significant difficulty learning to tie a tie
	difficulty with motor tasks requiring several steps
	difficulty lining up numbers correctly for math problems and/or balancing a

0–5	Item
	checkbook
	difficulty learning new motor tasks: a new dance, sport or exercise activity, how to drive
	lose your balance frequently
	significant difficulty learning to type the “proper” way
	Sensory-Based Motor Skills subtotal: _____ of 105

Social / Emotional

22 items · 0 = never, 5 = always

0–5	Item
	dislike changes in plans or routines, needs structure
	dig in your heels when others push you to change course
	cry easily, often over things others don’t, and feel things deeply
	have trouble finishing things
	difficulty making decisions
	need things done a certain way, and feel uneasy when they aren’t
	prefer solitary activities, avoids groups
	feel impatient and/or impulsive
	difficulty with social cues and non verbal language
	difficulty with authority figures
	trouble relating to and socializing with peers and colleagues
	have a hard time losing at games or competitions
	have strong feelings of anger or rage
	get frustrated easily
	need sameness and routine; need to know what to expect
	have panic or anxiety attacks
	troubled by fears or phobias
	need things just so: foods that can’t touch on your plate, clothes worn a certain way, routines that can’t be broken
	easily distracted, with trouble staying organized
	hate surprises

0–5	Item
	difficulty seeking out and maintaining relationships
	avoid eye contact
	Social / Emotional subtotal: _____ of 110

Internal Regulation

7 items · 0 = never, 5 = always

0–5	Item
	difficulty falling asleep or getting on a sleep schedule
	your heart rate speeds up and won't slow down at rest, or won't speed up for tasks that require a higher heart rate
	breathing too fast or too slow for the appropriate state of arousal
	over or under sensitivity to bowel and bladder sensations
	over or under sensitivity to the sensation of hunger/appetite
	irregular, inconsistent bowel, bladder and appetite sensations
	difficulty regulating your body temperature
	Internal Regulation subtotal: _____ of 35

Totals

Sensory Modulation	_____ of 245
Sensory Discrimination	_____ of 195
Sensory-Based Motor Skills	_____ of 105
Social / Emotional	_____ of 110
Internal Regulation	_____ of 35
OVERALL TOTAL	_____ **of 690**
Number of items rated 4 or 5	_____ of 138
Number of items rated 0	_____ of 138

Which areas affect my daily life most, and how

What Helps

Sensory sensitivities are part of how your nervous system is wired, and they come with gifts as well as challenges. A few ways to care for yours:

- **Get curious about your patterns.** Your highest ratings point to the senses that need the most care. Curiosity will serve you far better than judgment here.
- **Build a sensory toolkit.** Noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses, soft tag-free clothing, a weighted blanket, something crunchy or chewy, a scent you love: small supports can make a big difference.
- **Plan time to recover.** After a crowded or noisy stretch, give your system a chance to reset with a dim room, a warm shower or slow, easy movement.
- **Give your body heavy work.** Carrying groceries, pushing against a wall, swimming or hiking uphill can calm a busy system.
- **Befriend the parts that react.** A part of you that bristles at a scratchy tag or a loud room may be trying to protect you. Thank it, and ask what would help it feel safer.

Calling on Support

Your senses are the threads that tie you to the living world, and that world has its own ways of soothing them. When your system feels flooded or flat, head outside if you can and let the land offer what you need: cool creek water running over your wrists, the hum of bees in a lavender patch, moss under your fingertips, the squeak of fresh snow underfoot, a slab of sun-warmed rock to stretch out across. You might call on an animal ally who knows how to rest after the chase, or on ancestors whose hands knew the steady rhythm of kneading, spinning or rowing. Ask your future self, the one who has learned to tend these sensitivities with love, what they would reach for today. And let the Great Mystery, or whatever you call the sacred, hold the parts of you that have felt too much for too long.

A Final Word

However your senses are wired, they are how you take in the beauty of the world. Tending them with kindness is one more way of tending yourself.

Free Resources

- The original Adult SPD Checklist and articles on sensory processing: sensory-processing-disorder.com
- The STAR Institute for Sensory Processing, with free information and a directory of occupational therapists: sensoryhealth.org
- Related handout: Sensation Vocabulary.

Influences and Credits

- Checklist items adapted from the Adult Sensory Processing Disorder Checklist at sensory-processing-disorder.com, lightly reworded here.
- The groupings of sensory modulation, sensory discrimination and sensory-based motor skills follow the work of occupational therapist Dr. Lucy Jane Miller, building on the sensory integration research of Dr. A. Jean Ayres.
- Befriending reactive parts comes from Internal Family Systems, developed by Dr. Richard Schwartz.
- Calling on the support of the living world and the unseen comes from Neoshamanic IFS (NIFS), the approach I practice and teach.