

Understanding Your Highly Sensitive Nature

Objective

To understand what it means to be a highly sensitive person (HSP) and identify ways to cope.

What to Know

Have you ever been told, "You're too sensitive! You feel way too much!"? If so, it is important to understand that being a highly sensitive person (HSP) is not a negative trait. Highly sensitive people (HSPs) have a heightened "sensory-processing sensitivity" (SPS), which is not a personality flaw but a biological factor. Here are twelve signs that may indicate you are a highly sensitive person. Check off any that apply to you:

- You are sensitive to your emotions, and you feel things deeply.
- You react strongly to stimuli like noise, light, hunger, pain, or strong scents.
- Multitasking is challenging for you, as you prefer focusing on one thing at a time.
- You can pick up on others' emotions easily.
- You enjoy solitude.
- You may be hypersensitive, constantly scanning your surroundings for danger.
- You may be anxious or have a dysregulated nervous system.
- Violence and intense scenes affect you deeply.
- You have a remarkable ability to appreciate things deeply, such as nature and beauty.
- You are strongly affected by criticism.
- Your inner life is rich, complex, and deep.
- You often feel extremely empathic toward others.
- Total your checkmarks.

If you checked off more than four statements, you are probably an HSP.

Being highly sensitive means that your brain is wired differently, like having an energy antenna that picks up on signals that others might not notice. For example, you may hear a distant dog barking or sense dense, heavy energy in a room when others do not. Approximately 15-20% of the population identifies as highly sensitive. You can determine if you are an HSP by taking the [Highly Sensitive Person Scale \(HSPS\)](#), developed by Elaine and Art Aron.

If you are an HSP, remember you are not alone. There are many strategies to manage life effectively, and you can also focus on your strengths:

Empathy. You may easily understand and connect with the emotions and experiences of others. Compassion and caring might be your superpowers.

Attention to Detail. You may have a keen eye for detail and are observant, which can be valuable in many professions and activities that require precision and accuracy.

Deep Emotional Processing. You probably process emotions deeply, which can lead to a rich inner life and a strong capacity for introspection, self-awareness, and personal growth.

Creativity. You might be creative and excel in artistic pursuits such as writing, painting, music, and other forms of creative expression. Your ability to notice subtleties in your environment can inspire unique and innovative ideas.

Strong Intuition. Your “gut feeling” may help you make sound decisions, and you may quickly pick up on subtle cues and information that others miss.

Empathic Communication. Your nature makes you an excellent listener and communicator. You can provide emotional support and understanding to those in need.

Loyalty and Commitment. You tend to be loyal and committed in your relationships and endeavors. You invest deeply in connections and are a reliable friend, partner, and team member.

Appreciation for Beauty. You have a heightened appreciation for beauty in the world, whether it is in nature, art, or the experiences of everyday life. This allows you to find joy and wonder in simple things.

Strong Work Ethic. You may often display a strong work ethic and attention to quality in your work. You are detail-oriented and strive for excellence in your professional endeavors.

Integrity. You probably value authenticity and honesty, both in yourself and in others. You are often driven by a sense of integrity and moral values.

Problem-Solving Skills. Your ability to deeply analyze situations can lead to effective problem-solving and creative solutions in many contexts.

Environmental Sensitivity. You may be environmentally conscious and passionate about conservation and sustainable living, contributing positively to environmental causes.

Being highly sensitive comes with its own set of challenges, but these strengths can be harnessed and celebrated, allowing you to thrive and make meaningful contributions.

Here are some ways to cope with the challenges associated with being an HSP:

- Embrace the arts and music as therapeutic outlets.
- Cultivate deep, meaningful connections with a few individuals.
- Prioritize self-care with a healthy diet, adequate rest, and minimal caffeine.
- Identify and avoid overwhelming stimuli.
- Communicate openly with loved ones about your sensitivity.
- Establish firm boundaries and learn to say "no" when needed.

- Create a safe and quiet space for your "me time."

Being highly sensitive is not something to be ashamed of. Embrace your unique wiring without apology. Your sensitivity is a gift that contributes to a more caring and humane world.

What to Do

1. Begin by finding a quiet and comfortable space where you will not be distracted or disturbed.

2. Start with a few minutes of mindful breathing to center yourself. Inhale deeply through your nose, hold for a moment, and exhale slowly through your mouth. Focus on your breath to calm your mind.

3. Close your eyes and bring your attention to your senses one by one:

- **Touch:** Slowly touch different surfaces around you, such as a soft fabric, a textured object, or a smooth surface. Pay close attention to the sensations on your skin. How does it feel? Is it comforting or stimulating?
- **Hearing:** Listen to the sounds around you, both near and far. Pay attention to the subtle sounds you might not have noticed before. Are there distant birdsong, a gentle breeze, or the hum of appliances? How do these sounds affect your mood?
- **Smell:** Take a moment to smell the environment around you. It could be the scent of nature if you are outside or the aroma of a familiar space if you are indoors. What emotions or memories do these scents evoke?
- **Taste:** If you have a small, safe snack or beverage nearby, take a bite or a sip. Savor the flavors and textures. How does this taste experience affect your mood and senses?
- **Sight:** Slowly open your eyes and observe your surroundings. Pay attention to colors, shapes, and details you might not typically notice. How does the visual environment impact your emotions or energy levels?

4. After exploring each sense, take a moment to write down your observations and feelings in the space below. Reflect on how heightened sensitivity influences your perception of the world around you.

How can you use your heightened awareness in your daily life?

How can you make adjustments to your environment or routines to better accommodate your sensitivity?

Create a brief action plan based on your sensory exploration. Identify specific strategies or practices you can implement to manage your sensitivity in a healthy and positive manner. For example, you might decide to create a calming sensory space at home or use noise-canceling headphones. Write your plan below:

Reflections on This Exercise

What was challenging about this exercise? Be specific.

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

Do you better understand what it means to be an HSP after completing this exercise? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
