



Hyper- and Hypo-sensitivities

People with an ASD can be over- or under-sensitive in any or all of their senses. You may hear this referred to as being 'hypersensitive' or 'hyposensitive'.

Sight

Hypo (under-sensitive)	Hyper (over-sensitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objects appear quite dark, or lose some of their features. • Central vision is blurred but peripheral vision quite sharp. • A central object is magnified but things on the periphery are blurred. • Poor depth perception – problems with throwing and catching; clumsiness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distorted vision: objects and bright lights can appear to jump around. • Images may fragment. • Easier and more pleasurable to focus on a detail rather than the whole object.

Hearing

Hypo (under-sensitive)	Hyper (over-sensitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May only hear sounds in one ear, the other ear having only partial hearing or none at all. • May not acknowledge particular sounds. • Might enjoy crowded, noisy places or bang doors and objects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise can be magnified and sounds become distorted and muddled. • Particularly sensitive to sound and can, for example hear conversations in the distance. • Inability to cut out sounds – notably background noise, which often leads to difficulties concentrating.

Touch

Hypo (under-sensitive)	Hyper (over-sensitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds others tightly - needs to do so before there is a sensation of having applied any pressure. • Has a high pain threshold. • May self-harm. • Enjoys heavy objects (eg, weighted blankets) on top of them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Touch can be painful and uncomfortable; people may not like to be touched and this can affect their relationships with others. • Dislikes having anything on hands or feet. • Difficulties brushing and washing hair because head is sensitive. • Only likes certain types of clothing or textures.





Taste

Hypo (under-sensitive)	Hyper (over-sensitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likes very spicy foods. Eats everything - soil, grass, Play-dough. This is known as pica. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finds some flavours and foods too strong and overpowering because of very sensitive taste buds. Has a restricted diet. Certain textures cause discomfort; some children will only eat smooth foods like mashed potatoes or ice-cream



Smell

Hypo (under-sensitive)	Hyper (over-sensitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people have no sense of smell and fail to notice extreme odours (this can include their own body odour). Some people may lick things to get a better sense of what they are. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smells can be intense and overpowering. This can cause toileting problems. Dislikes people with distinctive perfumes, shampoos, etc.

Balance (vestibular)

Hypo (under-sensitive)	Hyper (over-sensitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A need to rock, swing or spin to get some sensory input. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties with activities like sport, where we need to control our movements. Difficulties stopping quickly or during an activity. May experience carsickness. Difficulties with activities where the head is not upright or feet are off the ground.

Body awareness (proprioception)

Hypo (under-sensitive)	Hyper (over-sensitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stands too close to others, because they cannot measure their proximity to other people and judge personal space. Hard to navigate rooms and avoid obstructions. May bump into people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties with fine motor skills: manipulating small objects like buttons or shoelaces. Moves whole body to look at something.

Adapted from National Autistic Society, UK - <http://www.autism.org.uk/sensory>

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