

23 Signs That You're A Highly Sensitive Person

Description

Successful sensitive male role models were hard to find growing up in the seventies in a middle-class Boston suburb. So for most of my life I considered myself a fairly thick-skinned, typical guy. "Sensitivity" was not a trait encouraged in men. Stability, strength and steadfastness were more like it. All good traits, but often it seemed like an either or equation rather than a both and.

So I followed in the footsteps of the male role models I had; mostly stoic, emotionally unavailable, intellectually focused men.

That worked for a while but at some point during the past 18 or so years that I have been actively and sometimes intensively engaged in personal growth, I have discovered that behind the walls and under the layers of distance and detachment lives a highly sensitive person.

This awakening sensitivity has, sometimes, felt more like a burden than a blessing. But ultimately, and only quite recently, I have come to accept my sensitivity as a gift and a powerful ally on my journey of personal evolution.

When I began this journey, the term **Highly Sensitive Person** was not widely known (if at all). But as more has been written about Highly Sensitive People and the concept has gained wider (though certainly not universal) acceptance I have come to recognize and accept myself as a Highly Sensitive Person.

It is estimated that 20% of the human population would test positive for what Carl Jung called **Innate Sensitiveness**. This innate sensitivity has been well researched and the term Highly Sensitive Person was coined in 1996 by [Elaine N. Aron, Ph.D.](#) and explored in her book, [The Highly Sensitive Person: How To Thrive When The World Overwhelms You](#)

Wikipedia has this [definition of Highly Sensitive Person](#):

A highly sensitive person (HSP) is a person having the innate trait of high sensitivity (or innate sensitiveness as Carl Gustav Jung originally coined it). According to Elaine N. Aron and colleagues as well as other researchers, highly sensitive people, which would represent about a fifth of the population, process sensory data much more deeply and thoroughly due to a biological difference in their nervous systems. This is a specific trait with key consequences that in the past has often been confused with innate shyness, inhibitedness, innate fearfulness, introversion, and so on. The existence of the trait of innate sensitivity was demonstrated using a test that was shown to have both internal and external validity.

While the idea of highly sensitive people is still shrugged off by the mainstream press and health-care community, I have no doubt that, just as people have different levels of visual acuity, hearing,

intelligence and physical grace, there are also varying levels of what I call vibrational sensitivity.

In my observation there is no diagnostic device presently available that is as sensitive as the human body. When properly tuned, our physical bodies have the ability to perceive and respond to our environment with an accuracy that far exceeds the capacity of our present technology. And some of us have bodies that are naturally tuned to be more sensitive to our vibrational environment.

So, for better or worse, that puts highly sensitive people in the unenviable position of being the canaries in the coalmine. Our sensitivity to the auditory, environmental, and vibrational pollution that is prevalent in our world means that we often display physical, emotional and vibrational symptoms long before others less sensitive than us.

That's the bad news.

But fear not, there is good news! If you are a highly sensitive person, your sensitivity indicates that your body is more highly tuned than most people's. And, with a bit of effort, training and regular practice, you can learn to leverage your sensitivity to create success and take your life to the next level. I have! More on that later.

For now, let's look at some of the "symptoms" of highly sensitive people because, if you're like I was, you might not even know that you're highly sensitive. And when you don't know that you're highly sensitive it can be very difficult and uncomfortable to live in this world filled with less sensitive people who don't understand why you have to cover your ears when an ambulance goes by, or leave a restaurant that smells like bleach, or sit under a full-spectrum light during the winter.

So if you have ever wondered if you are highly sensitive, here is a list of signs that could indicate that you are a Highly Sensitive Person. (I've added some personal notes to a few of the items on the list).

1. Can you hear things others cannot, especially high-pitched sounds?

Do you hear sirens long before anyone else? Does the high-pitched hum of a partially dimmed light fixture get under your skin when no one else seems to notice? Does the whirring fan in your computer distract you? Is it difficult for you to sleep in the same room as a refrigerator? Do you need to cover your ears when a loud siren passes by? Do you use earplugs at concerts or on planes?

2. Do you notice smells that others miss?

I have a weird olfactory sense: When it comes to nice, natural smells such as roses and lilacs, I have to put my nose right into the flower in order to smell it. But when it comes to not-so-nice smells I am highly attuned. I can smell cigarette smoke from 50-feet away when I'm outside and the wind is blowing in the opposite direction. When I walk into a restaurant that has just cleaned up with chlorine bleach, I often have to turn around and leave because the smell is overpowering. I can tell if a home has mold the minute I walk in the door. And don't get me started on some of the unnatural perfumes that have nearly made me... well I think you get the idea!

3. Do you know what other people need before they ask?

This post, [Intuition or Observation & Analysis](#), provides a great example of this.

4. Do you notice the flicker on older computer screens or older fluorescent fixtures?

I'm still amazed at how often I used to sit down at someone else's computer and wonder how they

were able to work on it with the refresh rate set so low. If they were not looking over my shoulder I would usually go in and quickly increase the refresh rate which took away the flicker and provided me with some relief.

5. Do you get “overwhelmed” by joy when you experience great beauty: A beautiful sunset, an incredible musical performance, the smile of your child?

High vibrational sensitivity is not always triggered by “negative” experiences. Positive, beautiful, sublime experiences can also awaken that sensitivity. But again, the difference and occasionally the difficulty for sensitive people is the intensity of the experience. Highly sensitive people can be truly overwhelmed by a beautiful experience, which is fine if you are alone on the beach watching a spectacular sunset, but may not be so great if you happen to look out the window at work just at the peak moment of that beautiful sunset.

6. Do you feel threatened or uneasy in large crowds or big cities?

Sometimes I enjoy going into San Francisco, and other times I just can't wait to get out. But no matter how I'm feeling while I'm there, I always notice a distinct sense of calmness descending upon me as I leave the City. It's as if I'm passing through an invisible energy boundary as I cross the Golden Gate Bridge.

7. Do you have “emotional radar” that picks up on what others are feeling?

Do you know what people are feeling before they tell you? Do you ever walk into a room and sense that there has been an argument?

8. Do you pick up physical symptoms from other people?

Have you ever been feeling great and then run into a friend who had a headache and suddenly noticed a headache coming on? I once massaged a friend's knee after she tweaked it during a yoga class. When I was done, she felt great, but I could hardly walk!

9. Does reading or hearing about bad news have a dramatic impact on your mood?

Once upon a time I was a news and information junkie. Knowing what was happening in the world was important. As my sensitivity awakened, however, I began to recognize that the news is almost exclusively low-vibration information and had a dramatic and usually negative impact on me. A few years ago I did a week long news fast to see if it would make a difference. It did! Soon after that, I stopped watching, listening to or reading the news on a regular basis. And while I still don't watch or listen to the news, I am now able to read the paper or gather snippets of news from the Internet without noticing a dramatic effect on my mood.

10. If you see a bad car accident does it affect you for the entire day?

Most people have a reaction when seeing an accident but for some highly sensitive people the effect can be dramatic and long lasting.

11. Have you been diagnosed with SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) and/or do you experience a noticeable drop in your energy and mood during the winter?

12. Have you ever had a transcendent or mystical experience?

Highly sensitive people are naturally more open to experiences of bliss, ecstasy and spiritual awakening.

13. Do you have a strong reaction when you drink caffeine or when you attempt to stop?

Everything we put into our bodies has both a physical and energetic effect. For most people the physical effects of caffeine are not that dramatic. But sensitive people also feel the energetic effects of that caffeine and the combination can be quite powerful.

14. Do you have food sensitivities or allergies?

Most of us are putting stuff into our bodies that was never meant to go there. This is fine for people who are not highly sensitive (not really!) but if you are highly sensitive your body may tell you, in no uncertain terms, what you can and cannot put into it. I used to be able to eat pretty much anything. Now, if I have even a bite of gluten or dairy or something really sweet my body reacts instantly!

15. Do you have allergies or asthma?

As with food allergies, environmental allergies can indicate that you are reacting to allergens on both a physical and energetic level.

16. Are you a “lightweight?”

A friend of mine used to say that I could “get drunk from sniffing the bottle cap!” And she wasn’t that far off. My karate buddies nicknamed me “No Mas” because of my tendency to get a little rambunctious after a bottle of beer. If one glass of wine puts you under the table you might be highly sensitive.

17. Are you sensitive to over-the-counter, prescribed or illegal drugs?

Can you take half the recommended dosage of a drug and experience a noticeable effect? Have you had an overwhelming experience when experimenting with other drugs?

18. If you have ever had surgery, did it take longer to recover from the effects of the anesthesia than from the surgery itself?

For many sensitive people anesthesia can have a long-lasting and powerful effect. Anesthesia impacts not only the physical body but also the energy body by putting you into a completely unnatural state. It’s a neither here nor there state that can wreak havoc on a sensitive person’s system.

19. Is being in a calm, peaceful environment very important for you?

Does clutter, stress you out? Do harsh, disharmonious colors fluster you? Do you feel at peace in a beautiful garden? Is it important for you to create a “sanctuary” within your home?

20. Do you get claustrophobic when you spend too much time indoors?

For many sensitive people, being inside for too long leads to a feeling of claustrophobia, lethargy and/or irritation.

21. Is it important for you to spend time alone?

Highly sensitive people often feel better when alone. In extreme cases, this need to be alone can be debilitating to the point where being around others is almost impossible.

22. Do you experience dramatic mood swings, sometimes for no apparent reason?

Have you ever been sitting at work, or on the bus, or in a café, feeling pretty good, and suddenly, for no apparent reason, started to feel sad, or angry? Highly sensitive people are more sensitive to both their own emotional content as well as the emotions of those around them. So if this happens to you, you may be connecting with something happening inside of you, but you might also be unintentionally “tuning in” to the emotional content of someone else.

23. Do you know when people are lying to you?

Have you ever just known that someone is telling you a lie, even when you have no “logical” reason to believe that to be so?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. These are examples of possible “symptoms” of high sensitivity. If ten or more of these experiences rang true for you, it’s highly likely that you’re a highly sensitive person. But even if you said “Yes” to just a handful of these you could be highly sensitive. In fact, even just one or two of these, if they are very strong for you, could indicate high sensitivity.

Ultimately I believe that being a highly sensitive person is a gift. It certainly has become a gift to me! And, yes, I know, it does not always feel that way. It can feel like a burden and a curse. But when you learn how to put boundaries and systems into place you can begin to access and harness that sensitivity and use it to create the life you desire.

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Author

mikayalaja_ccfz7c

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