

Sensory Survival Guide for Adults

Your profile, work, public, home, and the recovery that makes the rest possible.

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This is not something you outgrow

Sensory differences are not a phase and they do not reduce with age. What changes is that you have more control and less support.

Your profile

Tick what applies. The point is not a score — it is knowing which inputs cost you, so you can spend your effort on those.

Sound

- ☐ Background noise stays in the foreground
- ☐ Specific sounds are intolerable rather than annoying
- ☐ Open-plan spaces are exhausting
- ☐ I need silence to concentrate

Light

- ☐ Fluorescent lighting is visible to me as flicker
- ☐ Bright light causes headaches
- ☐ Screens at full brightness are hard to look at

Touch

- ☐ Clothing tags and seams
- ☐ Certain fabrics are unwearable
- ☐ Light touch is worse than firm

Movement

- ☐ Motion sickness
- ☐ Discomfort with heights or escalators
- ☐ I need movement to concentrate

Interoception

- ☐ I miss hunger, thirst, or needing the bathroom
- ☐ I notice an emotion physically before I can name it

At work

Accommodations worth asking for

- ☐ Noise-reducing headphones
- ☐ A desk away from traffic and noise
- ☐ Permission to work somewhere quieter for focused tasks
- ☐ Remote or hybrid days
- ☐ Advance notice of changes and meetings
- ☐ Written follow-up after verbal instructions
- ☐ Control over your own lighting
- ☐ A quiet space for breaks

On disclosure. You do not have to disclose a diagnosis to request an adjustment. You can ask for what you need in functional terms — “I concentrate better away from the main floor” is a complete request.

In public

- ☐ Plan the route and the exit before you go
- ☐ Quieter times of day
- ☐ Headphones by choice
- ☐ A signal with whoever you are with that means you need to leave
- ☐ Recovery time built in afterward, not another demand

At home

- ☐ One sound source at a time
- ☐ Lamps instead of overhead lighting
- ☐ A low-stimulus space that is yours
- ☐ Reduce decisions on demanding days
- ☐ **Batch errands rather than spreading them**

Recovery and masking

Recovery is not indulgence. Low-demand time after a demanding day is what restores capacity. Skipping it is what turns a hard week into burnout.

Masking — suppressing responses to sensory input to appear unaffected — is effortful, and the effort is invisible. Sustained masking without recovery is described consistently as a contributor to burnout.

Warning signs worth acting on

Exhaustion that rest does not fix · reduced tolerance for things you normally manage · withdrawing from everything · **losing skills you had.**

When to seek help. An occupational therapist can assess your sensory profile and help you build an environment that works. Sensory differences in adults are frequently undiagnosed and frequently dismissed.

This guide is for general information and is not medical advice, a diagnosis, or employment advice. Workplace adjustment processes vary by employer and location. Reviewed by Dr. Eva Lassey, PT, DPT. © 2026 DrSensory LLC · drsensory.com/guides/adult-sensory-guide