



Strategies for Empaths and Sensitive People

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Empaths are emotional sponges who absorb other peoples' stress into their own bodies. As an empath myself, I know how exhausting this can be.

Quiz: Are You an Empath?

Are you super sensitive to the world around you? You may be an empath! Take this quiz and make the first step toward embracing and developing your gifts.

As a psychiatrist and an empath, people often ask me the difference between *having empathy* and *being an empath*.

Having empathy means our heart goes out to another person in joy or pain. But for empaths it goes much farther. We actually feel others' emotions, energy, and physical symptoms in our own bodies, without the usual defenses that most people have!!

How do you know if you are an empath? Take the following 20 question *Empath Self-Assessment Quiz* by answering "mostly yes" or "mostly no" to each question.

1. Have I been labeled as "overly sensitive," shy, or introverted?
2. Do I frequently get overwhelmed or anxious?
3. Do arguments or yelling make me ill?
4. Do I often feel like I don't fit in?
5. Am I drained by crowds and need alone time to revive myself?
6. Am I over stimulated by noise, odors, or non-stop talkers?
7. Do I have chemical sensitivities or can't tolerate scratchy clothes?
8. Do I prefer taking my own car places so I can leave early if I need to?
9. Do I overeat to cope with stress?
10. Am I afraid of becoming suffocated by intimate relationships?
11. Do I startle easily?
12. Do I react strongly to caffeine or medications?
13. Do I have a low pain threshold?
14. Do I tend to socially isolate?
15. Do I absorb other people's stress, emotions, or symptoms?
16. Am I overwhelmed by multitasking and prefer doing one thing at a time?
17. Do I replenish myself in nature?
18. Do I need a long time to recuperate after being with difficult people or energy vampires?



19. Do I feel better in small cities or the country than large cities?
20. Do I prefer one-to-one interactions or small groups rather than large gatherings?

Now calculate your results:

- If you answered yes to one to five questions, you're at least partially an empath.
- Responding yes to six to ten questions means you have moderate empathic tendencies.
- Responding yes to eleven to fifteen means you have strong empathic tendencies.
- Answering yes to more than fifteen questions means that you are a full-blown empath.

1. Ask yourself, "Is this symptom or emotion mine or someone else's?"

A tip-off that you're absorbing someone's energy is to notice if you experience a sudden change of mood or physical state around that person. Most likely, if you didn't feel anxious, depressed, exhausted, or sick before, the discomfort is at least partially coming from him or her. If you move away and the discomfort dissipates, it is definitely not yours! Sometimes, though, the emotion or symptom may be both yours and another person's. Feelings are catchy, especially if they relate to a hot button issue for you. You are more prone to take on the emotional or physical pain that you haven't worked out in yourself. The more you heal issues that trigger you, the less likely you'll be to absorb emotions from others.

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Finding out you are an empath is a revelation that can change your life. You are not neurotic. You are not crazy. You are not making things up. The secret of being an empath is to honor your needs and have specific strategies in place to guard your sensitivities. Determining if you are an empath will clarify your needs and which protection strategies to use to meet them. Learning to cope as an empath is essential to gain a comfort zone in your life so you can enjoy the many gifts of your sensitivities.

Here are some basic strategies for empaths and all people battling with low energy from my book, *The Empath's Survival Guide: Life Strategies for Sensitive People*. I practice these strategies in my life and teach them to my patients and workshop participants—and you can turn to these techniques if you're absorbing the stress or symptoms of others and you need ways to release them. Experiment. See which ones work best for you. Use them in situations where you are feeling ill or upset and suspect you're taking on someone else's physical or emotional distress.

2. Breathe and repeat this mantra to counter negative energy

When negativity strikes, immediately focus on your breath for a few minutes. Slowly and deeply, inhale and exhale to expel the uncomfortable energy. Breathing circulates negativity out of your body. Holding your breath or breathing shallowly keeps negativity stuck within you. As you breathe, I suggest firmly repeating aloud this mantra three times in a tone that conveys you mean what you're saying: Return to sender, return to sender, return to sender. The power of your voice can command the discomfort out of your body. Your breath is the vehicle that transports it back to the universe.

Also, while saying this mantra, you can specifically breathe toxic energy out of your lumbar spine in your lower back. The spaces between the lumbar vertebrae are conducive to acting as channels for eliminating unhealthy energy. Visualize the discomfort exiting through these spaces in your spine. Declare, "I release



you” as it leaves your body and blends with the giant energy matrix of life.

3. Step away from what’s disturbing you

Move at least twenty feet from the suspected source. See if you feel relief. Don’t worry about offending strangers. In a doctor’s office, movie, or other public place, don’t hesitate to change seats. If you’re sitting next to a noisy group in a restaurant, you don’t have to stay there and feel uncomfortable. Feel free to move to a more peaceful table. It’s fine to lovingly say “No,” to certain energies. Giving yourself permission to move is an act of self-care. Empaths often find themselves in overwhelming social situations. If that happens to you, be sure to take breaks to replenish yourself. Then, if you want to return to the gathering you can be in a more serene place.

4. Limit physical contact. Hugs are a choice!

Energy transfers through the eyes and touch. If you’re uncomfortable with someone, limit eye contact and touch, including hugs and hand-holding. Though hugging a loved one in distress often benefits you both, if you are wary of taking on their stress, make the hug short. You can keep sending them love from a distance. You have a choice about the kind of physical contact you participate in.

5. Detox in water

A quick way to dissolve stress and empathic pains is to immerse yourself in water. Empaths love water! Epsom salt baths are divine and also provide magnesium which is calming. You might want to add a little lavender essential oil to your bath—it is calming after a long day. The perfect empath getaway is soaking in natural mineral springs that purify all that ails you.

6. Set limits and boundaries

There’s no way around it. To survive and thrive, you need to set limits with people. If someone is draining, don’t be a doormat. Control how much time you

spend listening to the person. “No,” is a complete sentence! It’s okay to tell someone, “I’m sorry, I’m not up for going to a party tonight,” or “Let’s discuss this when you’re calmer. I can’t tolerate yelling,” or “I need to meditate and be quiet right now,” or “I can’t talk more than a few minutes unless you want to discuss solutions.” Sometimes changing communication patterns with friends is a retraining process, but being consistent with setting kind but firm limits will protect you from energy vampires.

7. Create alone time to regroup

Empaths need alone time to reconnect with their power. If you’ve picked up unwanted energy, be sure to take some alone time to center yourself. For a few minutes or more, quiet everything. No noise, bright lights, phone calls, texts, emails, internet, television, or conversations. It’s sometimes important to just feel your own energy without anyone else around. You are being your own best friend which is a way to nurture yourself. By decreasing external stimulation, it’s also easier to clear negativity.

8. Spend time in nature and practice “Earthing”


Empaths love nature and feel at ease there. Being in a fresh, clean, green environment or around water clears negativity. The Earth emanates healing. Try lying in a meadow and soaking up its energy in your entire body. This feels sublime! Earthing means going bare-foot and feeling the earth’s power through your feet. To shed other people’s energy, feel the grass between your bare toes, walk in the sand or the soil. Sense the nurturing medicine of the earth coming through your feet to ground you—a beautiful experience.

9. Take breaks from being online

You need regular time-out from technology that inundates you with too much information. Online media that triggers your emotions—such as Facebook groups, Instagram, violent news feeds—can impair your ability to fall sleep. It’s easy to pick up energy in the virtual world, so make sure you



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spend time in nature, meditating, or participating in other off-line activities that restore you. A complete technology-fast once in a while will do wonders for your sense of well-being. 

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