How Big Is This Feeling?

Many neurodivergent people only notice a feeling once it is loud. Knowing the quieter words gives you more time to choose what helps. Find the row, then the column that matches how big it feels right now.

FEELING FAMILY	●○○ LOW A whisper. Easy to miss.	●●○ MEDIUM Taking up space. You notice it.	●●● HIGH Loud. Hard to think past it.
Anxious fear · worry	**uneasy · unsettled · on edge** restless, fidgety, faint flutter in the belly	**worried · nervous · anxious** tight chest, racing thoughts, can't settle	**panicked · terrified · dread** pounding heart, shallow breath, shaking, urge to run
Angry anger · injustice	**annoyed · bothered · impatient** jaw tightens, short sighs, eye rolls	**frustrated · irritated · resentful** hot face, tense shoulders, louder voice	**furious · enraged · explosive** heat surging, clenched fists, words come out fast
Overwhelmed sensory · too much	**crowded · a bit much** sounds, lights or tags start to bother you	**overloaded · frazzled · overstimulated** everything too loud or bright, hard to think	**flooded · near meltdown** can't process words, need to get out now
Sad loss · longing	**low · blah · disappointed** slower, quieter, less energy	**sad · hurt · lonely** heavy limbs, lump in the throat, teary	**grief-stricken · devastated** crying hard, aching chest, hard to move
Rejected shame · rejection sensitivity	**self-conscious · awkward** warm cheeks, wanting to look away	**embarrassed · left out · not enough** stomach drops, replaying it, want to hide	**ashamed · humiliated · crushed** burning, collapsing inside, sure everyone is upset with you
Shut Down numb · disconnected	**spacey · flat · foggy** zoning out, hunger and thirst go quiet	**numb · checked out · distant** slow, heavy, words hard to find	**shut down · frozen · far away** can't move or speak, world feels unreal
Drained energy · burnout	**low battery · tired** yawning, slower to start things	**depleted · worn out** heavy eyes, irritable, everything takes effort	**burned out · empty** basic care feels impossible, skills stop working
PLEASANT STATES HAVE INTENSITY TOO			High joy or focus can still tip into overwhelm or missed body cues.
Calm safe · settled	**okay · steady** even breath, nothing pulling at you	**relaxed · settled · safe** loose shoulders, soft belly, slow breath	**peaceful · deeply at ease** heavy in a good way, sleepy, fully present
Joyful happy · excited	**content · pleased** small smile, body feels light	**happy · excited · playful** warmth, bounce, happy stims	**elated · giddy · buzzing** can't sit still, loud laughter, racing energy
Interested curiosity · focus	**curious · open** leaning in, eyes drawn to it	**engaged · absorbed** time moves fast, focus feels easy	**hyperfocused · locked in** lose track of time, miss hunger and bathroom cues

MIXED IS NORMAL
You can feel two families at once, like excited and anxious before a trip.

NO WORD YET? START WITH YOUR BODY
Pick the sensation that fits, then look across the row. Page 2 can help.

NO FEELING IS WRONG
Feelings carry information. The goal is noticing, not fixing or judging.

Body cues vary from person to person, and these are common examples, not rules. Draws on interoception and alexithymia research

Where Do I Feel It?

For many neurodivergent people, a feeling arrives as a body signal before it has a name. Scan from head to toe. Notice where something is happening and how big it is.

●○○ LOW ●●○ MEDIUM ●●● HIGH Same three sizes as page 1

Head & Face

- ●○○ slight pressure, tired eyes
- ●●○ tension headache, hot or flushed face
- ●●● pounding head, face burning, blurry vision

Throat & Voice

- ●○○ dry mouth, quieter voice
- ●●○ lump in the throat, voice tight or shaky
- ●●● can't get words out, or voice gets very loud

Chest & Breath

- ●○○ breath a little shallow or held
- ●●○ tight chest, faster heartbeat
- ●●● heart pounding, can't catch your breath

Stomach & Gut

- ●○○ faint flutter or knot
- ●●○ churning, queasy, appetite gone
- ●●● nausea, cramping, urgent bathroom need

Muscles & Hands

- ●○○ fidgety fingers, a bit stiff
- ●●○ clenched jaw, raised shoulders, restless legs
- ●●● shaking, fists, body rigid or limp

Skin & Temperature

- ●○○ a little warm or chilly
- ●●○ sweaty palms, clothes start to feel scratchy
- ●●● hot flash or icy cold, any touch feels like too much

Senses & Thinking

- ●○○ noises a bit sharper, focus drifting
- ●●○ lights and sound too much, hard to follow talk
- ●●● tunnel vision, words stop making sense

Energy & Movement

- ●○○ a little wired, or a little slow
- ●●○ pacing and bouncing, or heavy and sluggish
- ●●● can't stop moving, or can't move at all

WHY START WITH THE BODY?

~50% of autistic people show **alexithymia**, trouble identifying and describing feelings, compared with about 5% of others in the same studies.

Interoception, the sense of what is happening inside your body, can be quieter, louder or delayed in autism and ADHD. That is why a feeling may show up as a headache, a stomachache or sudden exhaustion first.

Watch for look-alikes. Hunger, thirst, pain, needing the bathroom and being too hot or cold can feel like irritation or anxiety. Check basic needs too.

MY CHECK-IN

Right now I feel _____

It feels ○ Low ○ Medium ○ High ○ Not sure

I notice it in my _____

It might be telling me _____

What might help right now _____

_____

Low is often the easiest time to act. High usually calls for calming the body first, then words.

Sources: Kinnaird, Stewart & Tchanturia, *European Psychiatry* 2019 (alexithymia in autism meta-analysis); Garfinkel et al., *Biological Psychology* 2016 (interoception in autism); Mahler, *Interoception: The Eighth Sensory System*. Educational only, not medical or mental health advice.