

Weird Symptom Checklist

The human body has a fascinating language for expressing its discontent, distress, depletion, and dis-ease. How many of the following signals is your body sending you?

As you review the list below, check the ones that sound familiar. Also note how long you've been experiencing them.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Unwanted weight gain or loss | <input type="checkbox"/> Brittle, weak, flaking, ridged, pitted, spotted, or misshapen fingernails | <input type="checkbox"/> Facial tics or eye fluttering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increasing fat stores around your abdomen, or development of a pot belly | <input type="checkbox"/> Bleeding or inflamed gums | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent headaches (including migraines or cluster headaches) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rashes, including eczema and psoriasis plaques, or red, scaly patches behind ears | <input type="checkbox"/> Coated, spotted, fissured, "bald," or scalloped tongue | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic musculoskeletal pain, stiffness, or tension (back of head, neck, back, joint) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acne, cysts, rosacea, and inflamed skin | <input type="checkbox"/> Dry, flaking skin (all over or just in patches) or raised, rough bumps | <input type="checkbox"/> Obsessive-compulsive behaviors (cuticle picking, hair pulling, lip or nail-biting) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small sores, cysts, or pimples at base of neck, around jawline | <input type="checkbox"/> Crepe-y skin, dull complexion, loss of skin sheen or "glow" | <input type="checkbox"/> Powerful or sudden food cravings, constant hunger or loss of appetite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Puffy face, swollen hands, feet, and ankles | <input type="checkbox"/> Dark circles or semi-circles of puffiness under eyes | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty feeling satisfied while eating, regularly eating until over-full or uncomfortable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stuffy, drippy, or congested nasal passages | <input type="checkbox"/> Watery or red-rimmed eyes, or eyes with bloodshot, greyish, or yellowish whites | <input type="checkbox"/> Digestive distress (gas, bloating, stomach pain, constipation or diarrhea, irritable bowel) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Itchiness or tickly feeling inside ears and throat | <input type="checkbox"/> Cracked and peeling lips | <input type="checkbox"/> Carpal tunnel syndrome, tendon soreness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hair thinning, loss, and dullness (head, body, eyelashes, and brows) | <input type="checkbox"/> Tongue bumps, mouth sores, cracking at corners of mouth | <input type="checkbox"/> Swollen or inflamed joints |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dandruff, athlete's foot, toenail fungus, or yeast infections | <input type="checkbox"/> Bad breath | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of libido or marked lack of interest in sensual contact |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Night sweats | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent colds and infections |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty getting to sleep or sleeping through the night | <input type="checkbox"/> Asthma or wheezing |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty waking up in the morning | <input type="checkbox"/> Elevated cholesterol, blood pressure, or c-reactive protein |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue, low endurance for physical activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Blood sugar and insulin imbalances |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling "blah," "meh," or otherwise uninspired | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression, moodiness, irritation, or lack of patience | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Brain fog, difficulty focusing, or slowed thinking | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Racing heart, rapid pulse, or irregular heartbeat | |

You might consider doing this review at the beginning of the the Healthy Deviant Adventure program, and then again a few months later.

I'm not suggesting that you'll see dramatic improvements in all (or even any) of your symptoms during the span of the program. But it can be helpful to stay aware of them, and to relay to your body that you are tracking them, interested in them, willing to make resolving them a priority.

And it may very well be that you *do* notice some differences. If so, note them on your Daily Deviance Journal Pages or Healthy Deviant Adventure Tracker.

__ **Total Boxes Checked (of 42)**



Learning to Love Your List

How did you do with the Weird Symptom Checklist? If you checked zero boxes, rock on. I hope it stays that way. But if you checked a bunch (or thought of some additional, unlisted symptoms that you *could* have checked), don't be too surprised. Twenty years ago, I would have checked almost all of them, and in my more depleted moments, I still check a few now and then.

Particularly if you think of yourself as pretty healthy, it can be alarming to go through a list like this and realize how many little (and not so little) things might be “wrong with you.” But there's another way to look at it. Maybe these weird symptoms, while unpleasant and disconcerting, are not wrong and bad; maybe they are appropriate and potentially helpful reflections of what's going on in your body, your mind, and your life—and what could be going better. Seen this way, your symptoms are not your enemies, but your friends.

I know, this is not the way we're taught to think about our health, but this is another important Healthy Deviant perspective-shift worth considering. Because if you accept the “normal” view (“Symptoms are the enemy! Just make them go away!”), you're going to be putting yourself at a huge health disadvantage. Here's why: Many of the conditions we now consider “chronic diseases” reliably progress from symptoms like these—symptoms that are functional indicators of bodies and lives out of balance. But our conventional medical system isn't set up to deal with bodies and lives out of balance. It's set up to fix acute traumas and infectious diseases. Accordingly, it tends to ignore or suppress subtle-but-escalating symptoms until they converge to meet the definition of an official “differential” diagnosis.

This represents a potentially deadly waiting game. You persist in a state of “subclinical” declining health for months or years until one day, your lab numbers get bad enough or your symptoms severe enough and, presto—you now meet the standards of an official diagnosis profile. Congrats, you are the proud new owner of a bona fide disease! Once you have an official name for your disease, there are officially designated treatments. Most are limited to more symptom-suppressing drugs and perhaps some surgical interventions. Few address the underlying causes and root imbalances that gave rise to your disease in the first place.

This approach virtually guarantees that lifestyle-related diseases won't be addressed at the early stages, when they are most easily prevented and reversed. It also guarantees that most people who are suffering from them will never get better (even if their symptoms are temporarily forced into submission). On the contrary, if their current lifestyle habits and conditions persist, they are much more likely to get *worse*, racking up new diagnoses and new prescriptions and bigger medical bills as the years go by.

But I don't want you (or anyone) to suffer the current fate of “most people.” That's why I'm a big fan of looking at your symptoms as helpful early-warning indicators of bigger troubles that could be coming down the pike. They are the check-engine lights on your body's dashboard. Busting them or putting duct tape over them makes no sense. Your symptoms are trying to tell you that something's going funky (see “Pissed-Off Body Syndrome,” below), and if you listen closely, they will often tell you how to put it right.

Here's another way to think about it. A symptom is like a message in a bottle, a message meant for you. You can read your message now or toss it back out to sea for a while. Eventually, though, it will come back in on a bigger wave, accompanied by more bottles. You can ignore the accumulating collection of bottles bobbing on your shore for as long as you like—until they eventually come in on even bigger waves, first drenching you, then knocking you down, and eventually pulling you under.

By the time most people are sixty, they've got a whole lot of bottles washing up. And they are taking an average of *five* prescription drugs daily. All of which makes me wonder how much of what we think of as “aging” is really just the predictable result of unrepaired damage and delayed maintenance that has been going on for decades. I invite you to ponder that a moment, then look at your checklist again, seeing your checked boxes through new eyes. If you can't yet “love” your annoying and worrisome symptoms (and I get that!), just hold them in a neutral space for now.

When you read my story, and reflect a bit more on your own, I think you'll have a better understanding why at least *respecting* your symptoms is such an important part of the Healthy Deviant approach.

Pissed-Off Body Syndrome

Pissed-Off Body Syndrome describes a broad category of conditions and chronic diseases that emerge when the body is not happy about some aspect of the way we are living. The body then does its level best to let us know that by throwing up all sorts of symptoms and flares.

Pissed-Off Body Syndrome, as I define it, comprises most of the ailments that currently send people to doctors' offices and clinics in search of relief. These include fatigue, chronic pain, migraines and headaches of all sorts, digestive distress, ulcers, irritable bowel, acne, psoriasis, eczema, rashes, hormone imbalances, depression, overuse injuries, low back pain, joint swelling, and more.

It also includes a lot of the annoying symptoms, problematic lab results, and “off” feelings we have long before those more dramatic problems emerge.

Many mysterious, complex diseases with fancy sounding names (including, I suspect, a great many diseases that have “no known cause” and for which

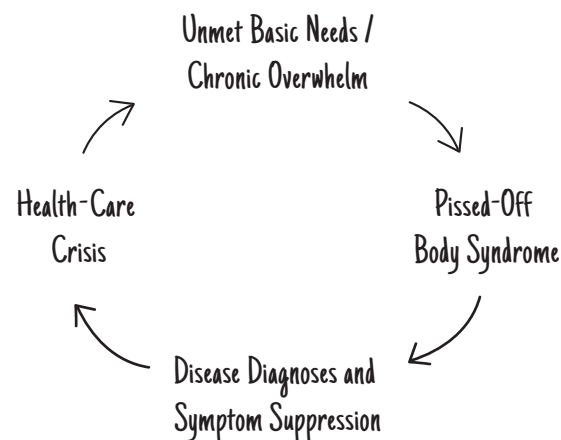
conventional treatments are not terribly effective) are all basically just some version of Pissed-Off Body Syndrome. That includes a lot of the problems you'll see in the "Weird Symptom Checklist," above.

The only way to cure Pissed-Off Body Syndrome is to figure out what is pissing the body off, and then stop doing that.

The problem is, most conventional doctors are not very good at recognizing the root causes of Pissed-Off Body Syndrome, much less at helping you to reverse it. There are reasons for that:

- It is not a topic taught in medical school (which is too bad, given that 97.3 percent of American adults are evidently suffering from it or will be soon).
- It doesn't have an official ICD (medical diagnostic code) or CPT (medical billing code).
- It is not something for which a doctor can confidently prescribe an approved pharmaceutical drug or medical procedure.
- It is a syndrome from which most medical doctors are themselves suffering.
- It is so pervasive that it has now become the normal state of most humans in our society.

You run a real risk of contracting Pissed-Off Body Syndrome whenever the body doesn't like something you are putting into it or on it, doing to it, asking of it, or otherwise exposing it to. It typically results from protracted states of irritation, imbalance, inflammation, toxicity, overload, and dozens of other assaults from the Unhealthy Default Reality.



Pissed-Off Body Syndrome is often triggered by some combination of unmet needs and overwhelming demands. That includes eating an imbalanced or low-nutrition diet; eating or drinking things you are intolerant of or that damage your intestinal lining; not drinking enough water; exposure to toxic ingredients, chemicals, or environments; from not moving your body enough; elevated stress levels; sleep deficits; overrunning your available resources and energy; excessive stimuli or anxiety; and lack of meaning, connection, pleasure, social support, love, affection, and joy.

Pissed-Off Body Syndrome can be triggered into high gear by a trauma, major stress, or any dramatic life event. And it is generally exacerbated by the ongoing lack of respect, attention, and repair opportunities we offer our bodies while under the Unhealthy Default Reality's sway.

In other words, Pissed-Off Body Syndrome is the natural outcome of living in the Unhealthy Default Reality. And the only way to cure it is to remove, avoid, or actively compensate for the irritating, overwhelming, and undermining factors that are giving rise to it.

Doing that requires Healthy Deviance. And because Healthy Deviance flies in the face of the Unhealthy Default Reality and demands resources it is currently absorbing, resolving Pissed-Off Body Syndrome generally requires you to actively reclaim and redirect some part of those drained resources (especially your energy, attention, and mojo) for the express purpose of returning yourself to health.

Bottom line: You cannot cure Pissed-Off Body Syndrome while continuing to piss off your body.

Keep in mind, though, that the Unhealthy Default Reality will never teach you anything that will move you beyond Pissed-Off Body Syndrome. You have to do that for yourself. You do this by meeting your body-mind's unmet needs, and either reducing your overwhelm or finding ways to rise above it.

You can begin any time you like. Your body will begin healing, and forgiving, from the moment you start.³⁰

Requisite legal disclaimer: I am not a medical doctor and my Weird Syndrome Checklist is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition or disease. Pissed-Off Body Syndrome is not a medically recognized condition. It is just a term I made up as a novel way of thinking about the health challenges a lot of us are having. If you have any health concerns that you think might require the attention of a medical doctor or other health professional, please consult one without delay.



Love the Body You're In

You know what? Most of us could stand to be a lot nicer to our bodies. And our bodies could do with a whole lot less hostility.

Even if you are currently suffering in your body, even if you are inherently unsatisfied with its present condition or downright angry with it for letting you down in some way, it can help to recognize that your body is, under the circumstances, serving you to the very best of its ability. It can also help to entertain the notion that your body might very well be reflecting its displeasure with how *you* are treating *it*.

Could you start a positive conversation with your body? Could you befriend it, and establish an open, respectful relationship that does your whole-person system good? My friend Jacquelyn Fletcher (JacquelynFletcher.com) has written a whole series of beautiful “Dear You” books in which she articulates the thoughts and feelings that have come up as she has related with her own body-mind, and ultimately healed that relationship at a deep level.

You might try writing your body a “Dear You” letter of your own, perhaps starting with a word of apology for the ways you’ve been out of touch or unkind. From there, share your gratitude that your body has stuck with you this long. Tell it about the relationship you would *like* to have. Ask your body what it would like you to know, and perhaps do differently. Then listen.

Wounded-Core Syndrome: Healing Trauma

If, in listening to your body, you hear from inner whisperings about adverse childhood events (ACEs) or trauma of any kind, get some help following that trail, because for many, unhealed traumas and post-traumatic stress are the unidentified root causes of numerous health challenges and increased disease risks.

For deeper reading on this topic, I recommend the work of psychiatrist James Gordon, MD, founder of the Center for Mind Body Medicine. He is an internationally recognized expert in the art of helping people reverse the psychological and biological damage done by all sorts of devastating losses and violent experiences, including population-wide traumatic events. Check out his most recent book, *The Transformation: Discovering Healing and Wholeness After Trauma*.

I also highly recommend the work of Resmaa Menakem, MSW, LICSW, SEP, author of *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Menakem, a therapist who served for two years as a military contractor in Afghanistan, addresses both racialized and ancestral trauma (from which, he notes, we *all* suffer) in a particularly wise, compassionate, and embodied way. If you want a sense of Menakem’s wisdom, listen to the podcast episode I recorded with him for *The Living Experiment* (titled “Trauma 1”) at LivingExperiment.com and learn more about his work (including his free online course) at Resmaa.com.