

Do you trust

Psychologists reveal the strategies for tuning in to our intuition and channeling our deepest wisdom

You meet someone new and feel a shiver of knowing that she'll become an important person in your life. Or you're offered a new investment opportunity, but a lurch in your stomach tells you to turn it down. Too often, we dismiss such hunches as a fluke, but according to psychiatrist Judith Orloff, M.D., author of *The Ecstasy of Surrender*, these "sixth sense" moments actually stem from a very real reasoning process in the brain.

"The conscious mind can only process so much information," says Dr. Orloff. So when this part of the brain is overloaded or under extreme pressure, the subconscious mind draws from past experiences and external cues to make split-second decisions—ones that happen so fast, the reaction only registers in us as a flash of knowing or a physical sensation.

"Intuition is instinctive and comes through as images, gut feelings and dreams—information that can safeguard your health, protect you from danger and help you choose positive relationships," affirms Dr. Orloff. "It allows you to access levels of consciousness beyond the intellectual mind."

The trouble is, Western culture teaches us to ignore or repress intuitive twinges. "Other people may raise an eyebrow or make a critical comment if you go with an intuitive feeling, so you learn to question your intuition," cautions Dr. Orloff. As a result, you miss opportunities, take the wrong path and find yourself riddled with self-doubt.

Luckily, it's easy to strengthen your innate sense of intuition—and uncover your true path to happiness and success.



your gut enough?

1 GET QUIET TO HEAR THE STILL, SMALL VOICE

The hectic rush of a typical go-go-go day can keep your mind so busy that you barely have time to think about where you put your keys or what to make for dinner, let alone conjure the stillness needed to find the faint whisper of your inner guide. That's why the experts recommend setting aside quiet time to cut through the noise and heighten your intuitive-ness. "It's like a radio," explains medical psychologist Sari Roth-Roemer, Ph.D., director of Intuitive Psychology, PLC, in Scottsdale, Arizona. "If you're not quite on a station, you hear fuzz in the background. Stillness helps you quiet that external noise so you can tune in with clear awareness."

If you struggle to stay focused on the faint whisper, Dr. Orloff suggests picturing the barrage of thoughts running through your mind as clouds passing by in the sky. "You're not attaching to the thoughts, so they won't jam up your circuits. Keep going inward and listening."

3 LET GOOSE BUMPS BE YOUR GUIDE

Of all the signs that enter your awareness, prioritize the bodily ones—like the feeling of hairs on your arm or neck standing on end. "Most intuitive hits start with a physical sensation," notes Roth-Roemer. "We have neurotransmitters in our gut just as in our brain. But when we're busy on autopilot, we're not paying attention to what our bodies are telling us."

To better tune into these visceral cues, Peirce suggests asking yourself a question like, *Is this option right for me?* then waiting for a physical feeling to surface. If you get a muscle contraction, a knot in your gut, a tight throat, cold feet or clammy hands, it's a sign to wait. But if your chest expands and you feel bubbly, warm and excited or you have goose bumps, that's a signal that those buried layers of awareness are leaning toward the opportunity and saying yes. "Often when thinking about a decision, we're using logic that has nothing to do with the present moment," explains Peirce. "Intuition gives you real-time guidance. The body will give you the answers if you let it."

2 PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS

"When developing intuition, focus on areas where you have some expertise," advises Roth-Roemer. If you're into antiques, for instance, pay extra attention to inklings you get while rummaging around a new shop. "You'll have an easier time recognizing intuitive instincts in subjects that you're already good at and this will provide positive feedback," explains Roth-Roemer. Once you learn what it feels like to successfully follow a hunch, you can draw on that skill with more confidence in other situations.

If you're unsure what signals to look for initially, try calling up sensory metaphors: Negotiating with a dealer might "leave a bad taste in your mouth." "Getting in touch with your five senses is a quick way to trigger an intuitive response," says counselor Penney Peirce, author of *The Intuitive Way*. "An experience might shine like a spotlight, weigh you down like a wet blanket or feel silky-smooth. That's a direct knowing and it's usually very accurate."

4 TRUST THAT YOU HAVE THE ANSWERS YOU NEED

The most important step once you start picking up on these powerful responses is believing in yourself. "We shut the door on intuition when we get scared or upset and worry about making a bad decision," asserts Roth-Roemer. When confronted with a difficult choice like which volunteer opportunity to take on or what retirement investment to go with, mental chatter like *I'm afraid to go with the wrong option* or *I'm going to regret this commitment* will only serve to cloud out your instinctive insights.

The key to counteracting the harmful effects of these thoughts, says Roth-Roemer, is cultivating greater self-compassion. When faced with insecurities, she recommends taking a moment and repeating, *May I be filled with love and kindness*. This type of mantra will reinforce a sense of faith in your intuitive awareness. "As soon as you start listening in self-kindness to what you need and valuing your intuitive gift, all of a sudden you've opened up your ability to see opportunities. You've allowed for the right, good thing to happen."