

2. *Exercise.* Whether you're Rollerblading, walking, or poised in a yogic sun salutation, exercise imparts an in-the-now body awareness that gives the intellect a rest. I especially recommend yoga, qigong (which combines movement with meditation), or t'ai chi ch'uan (graceful motions to find inner stillness). These techniques make you fit and also catalyze a direct experience of spirituality, an intelligence larger than your mind that naturally flows from the movements.
3. *Empathize.* To get more in sync with your emotions or another's, always ask yourself, "How can I respond from my heart, not just my head?"—the essence of empathy. An intellectual typically tries to solve a dilemma before empathizing with the feelings it evokes, a backward approach that can come off as robotic, dismissive, or cold. Instead, if your spouse is having a meltdown about work or the kids, first empathize. This emotionally aligns you with him or her, an effort your spouse will appreciate. "I know how you're feeling" can go a long way. When your spouse feels heard, tension melts. Then you can gently suggest tactical fixes. Similarly, when you're upset, empathize with what prompted this feeling before forcing an answer or self-flagellating. Such kindness paves the way for speedier resolutions.

★ Emotional Type 2: The Empath

You never really understand a person until you see it from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.

—ATTICUS FINCH IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

Empaths are highly sensitive, finely tuned instruments when it comes to emotions. They feel everything, sometimes to an extreme, and are less apt to intellectualize feelings. Intuition is the filter through which they experience the world. Empaths are naturally giving, spiritually attuned, and good listeners. If you want heart, empaths have got it. Through thick and thin, they're there for you, world-class nurturers.

The trademark of empaths is that they know where you're coming from. Some can do this without taking on people's feelings. However, for better or worse, others, like myself and many of my patients, can become angst-sucking sponges. This often overrides the sublime capacity to absorb positive emotions and all that is beautiful. If empaths are around peace and love, their bodies assimilate these and flourish. Negativity, though, often feels assaultive, exhausting. (It took one empath patient, a journalist, weeks to recover after reporting on a tsunami's devastation in Thailand.) Thus, they're particularly easy marks for emotional vampires, whose fear or rage can ravage empaths. As a subconscious defense, they may gain weight as a buffer. When thin, they're more vulnerable to negativity, a missing cause of overeating explored in my book *Positive Energy*. Plus, an empath's sensitivity can be overwhelming in romantic relationships; many stay single since they haven't learned to negotiate their special cohabitation needs with a partner, a topic I'll discuss in Chapter 8.

When empaths absorb the impact of stressful emotions, it can trigger panic attacks, depression, food, sex and drug binges, and a plethora of physical symptoms that defy traditional medical diagnosis. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that more than two million Americans suffer from chronic fatigue. It's likely that many of them are misdiagnosed empaths. Also, others of this emotional type become agoraphobic, recluses too spooked to venture outdoors.

Typically an empath, beset by these terrible symptoms, runs to the doctor for a million-dollar workup—blood tests, MRIs, scans up the wazoo—but not much is found. Next stop: the psychiatrist's office. Over the years, many well-intended mainstream doctors have asked me to prescribe Prozac for these patients, usually not the right call. A strength of Energy Psychiatry is that it recognizes empathy as a rewarding form of intuition to be developed with the proper skills. Once empaths get the hang of sensing in this way, their lives deepen. But for empaths to achieve freedom and enjoy their assets, they must learn to protect their sensitivity and find balance.

Since I'm an empath, I want to help all my empath patients cultivate this capacity and be comfortable with it. If you primarily process emotional energy this way, you probably have had certain signs and

symptoms since childhood. See if my experiences resonate. I've always been hyperattuned to other people's moods, good and bad. Before I learned to protect my energy, I felt them lodge in my body. Crowded places amplified my empathy. Girlfriends couldn't wait to go to shopping malls, but I perceived them as war zones. I could sense people's emotions ricocheting in the atmosphere like artillery fire. I wished I could've ducked them, but they darted right into me. I'd start out feeling fine but leave anxious, depressed, or tired. When I got home, I'd just crawl into bed, yearning for peace and quiet. Chagrined, I'd tell my physician-mother, a fashion hound who shopped with fervor. She'd respond, "Darling, you're just not tough enough," a comment that had nowhere to take me but down. My caring mother didn't realize that crowds can emotionally overload an empath. I can easily identify with one patient's description of her early empathy: "As a little girl, I thought God had left a window open in me, that he forgot to seal me up completely."

Empathy doesn't have to make you feel too much all the time. Now that I can center myself and refrain from shouldering civilization's discontents, empathy continues to make me freer, igniting my compassion, vitality, and sense of the miraculous.

To determine whether you're an emotional empath, take the following quiz.

QUIZ: AM I AN EMPATH?

Ask yourself:

- Have I been labeled as "too emotional" or overly sensitive?
- If a friend is distraught, do I start feeling it too?
- Are my feelings easily hurt?
- Am I emotionally drained by crowds and require time alone to revive?
- Do my nerves get frayed by noise, smells, or excessive talk?
- Do I prefer taking my own car places so that I can leave when I please?

- Do I overeat to cope with emotional stress?
- Am I afraid of becoming engulfed by intimate relationships?

If you answer yes to between one and three of these questions, you're at least part empath. Responding yes to more than three indicates that you've found your emotional type.

Recognizing that you're an empath is the first step in taking charge of your emotions instead of constantly drowning in them. As one empath to another, I want to legitimize your sensitivity so you don't think you're losing your gourd. I'd had numerous patients who've said, "Judith, I thought there was something wrong with me. I feel like such a sissy." We're not sissies. Our systems are just more permeable. Also realize that the fact that you're the only person feeling something doesn't invalidate your perceptions. For instance, when an empath patient, timid to begin with, asked his wannabe rock star neighbor to turn down "Adam Bomb," an earsplitting heavy metal band, the neighbor's response was, "Why? You're the only one who ever complains." This scenario is crazy-making for an empath, since it wrongly implies that a majority vote is necessary to justify one's stance. To maintain resolve in an emotionally coarse world, empaths must have enough self-knowledge to clearly articulate their needs. Otherwise, like my patient, you may slink away from such encounters feeling beaten and defenseless, licking your wounds. Staying on top of empathy will improve your self-care and relationships. Here's a summary of this emotional type.

THE EMPATH'S UPSIDE

- You've got a big heart, are gifted in helping others.
- Your sensitivity makes you passionate and exquisitely sensual.
- You're intuitive about people's thoughts and feelings.
- You're emotionally responsive, can relate to another's feelings.
- You're in touch with your body and emotions.
- You have a palpable sense of spirituality.

THE EMPATH'S DOWNSIDE

- You're an emotional sponge, absorbing people's negativity.
- You're so sensitive to emotions, you feel like a wire without insulation.
- You're prone to anxiety, depression, and fatigue.
- You may feel hemmed in living in the same space with other people.
- You may have chronic, debilitating physical symptoms.
- You have difficulty setting boundaries with draining people and get run over by them.

Candidly tallying which traits are productive or not makes you freer. Of course, you want to be emotionally charitable, intuitive, and open, the empath's well-deserved badges of honor. These qualities prevent the retardation of your life force that happens when you're imprisoned in your head. However, empathy won't make you free if you walk around perpetually raw, are easily fractured, or have your wildness go out in a whimper because you're constantly having to emotionally defend yourself. To be comfortable in your own skin, this emotional type must find the right mix of intellect, feeling, and groundedness. The next exercise, along with upcoming ones to combat emotional vampires, will help you achieve this.

Emotional Action Step

HOW TO FIND BALANCE

Practice these strategies to center yourself.

- *Enlist your intellect.* When you're emotionally wrung out or suspect you've taken on someone's distress, think things through to counter anxiety. Use both positive self-talk and logic to get grounded. Here's how: First, tell yourself that you can handle this circumstance while taking a few deep breaths to unwind. Second, repeat this mantra: "It is not my job to take on the emotions of

others. I can be loving without doing so." This belief must make sense for you to stay sane and happy. It forms the intellectual foundation for how you healthily cope with empathy.

- *Allow quiet time to emotionally decompress.* Get in the habit of taking calming mini-breaks throughout the day. Breathe in some fresh air. Stretch. Take a short walk around the office. These interludes will reduce the excessive stimulation of going nonstop.
- *Practice guerilla meditation.* To counter emotional overload, act fast and meditate for a few minutes. Find a private place to close your eyes. Lower your expectations—it doesn't have to be Shangri-La. My salvation has often been the bathroom (particularly in airports, the bane of my existence—human hordes crawling through security, loudspeakers screeching). Bathrooms are the one socially sanctioned location to be alone. Anytime, anywhere, be game to recenter yourself and release unwanted emotions. Do two things while meditating. First, keep exhaling pent-up negative emotions—loneliness, worry, and more. Feel them dissipate with each breath. Second, put your hand over your heart and visualize loving-kindness permeating you from head to toe. (See Chapter 2's Heart-Centering Meditation.) These actions will quickly relax you.
- *Define and honor your empathic needs.* Safeguard your sensitivities. In a calm, collected moment, make a list of your top five most emotionally rattling situations. Then formulate a plan for handling them so you don't fumble in the moment. Here are some practical examples of what to do in situations that predictably stymie empaths.
 - If someone asks too much of you, politely tell them no. It's not necessary to explain why. As the saying goes, "No is a complete sentence."
 - If your comfort level is three hours max for socializing—even if you adore the people—take your own car or have an alternative transportation plan so you're not stranded.

- If crowds are overwhelming, eat a high-protein meal beforehand (this grounds you) and sit in the far corner of, say, a theater or a party, not dead center.
- If you feel nuked by perfume, nicely request that your friends refrain from wearing it around you. If you can't avoid it, stand near a window or take frequent breaks to catch a breath of fresh air outdoors.
- If you overeat to numb negative emotions, practice the guerilla meditation mentioned above before you're lured to the refrigerator, a potential vortex of temptation. As an emergency measure, keep a cushion by the fridge so you can be poised to meditate instead of binge.
- Carve out private space at home. Then you won't be stricken by the feeling of too much togetherness. (Chapter 8 discusses nontraditional living settings compatible with an empath's comfort zone.)

Over time, I suggest adding to this list to keep yourself covered. You don't have to reinvent the wheel each time you're on emotional overload. With pragmatic strategies to cope, empaths can have quicker retorts, feel safer, and their talents can blossom.

Emotional Type 3: The Rock

Rocks are emotionally strong for themselves and others, as well as being practical. When you're reeling from emotions, rocks won't lose their cool. You can sob, complain, rant. They don't pull away or judge. But rocks are no empaths; there's a solid border between themselves and the world. They genuinely care about your delight and pain (you can curl up in a rock's arms anytime) but don't bear the brunt of these feelings. Though they prefer life to be on an even keel, they won't shirk difficulties. You can put a rock's name on your doctor's emergency contact form; during a health crisis, they'll bust their butt to be there for you. They'll gladly show up on your birthday and special occasions—they're not the type who's constantly too busy but makes