

Sensory Diet Activities for Home

The sensory diet is a carefully designed, personalized activity schedule that provides the sensory input a person's nervous system needs to stay focused and organized throughout the day.

To construct an effective sensory diet, you need to truly understand your child's sensory difficulties and how they interfere with his/her life. An OT will use his/her advanced training and evaluation skills to develop an appropriate sensory diet for your child which you will implement throughout the course of the day. Here are some activities to start a sensory diet at home.

Proprioception

Proprioceptive input (sensations from joints, muscles and connective tissues that lead to body awareness) can be obtained by lifting, pushing and pulling heavy objects as well as by engaging in activities that compress or distract the joints:

- Jump on a trampoline, play hopscotch, vacuum, carry books from one room to another, help wash windows or tables.
- Chair pushups, body squeezes, theraband stretches, weighted vest or lap pad.
- Fidget balls, theraputty, wiggle seats, or rocking chairs
- Play activities: donkey kicks, marching, wall push-ups, Animal walks.
- Roughhousing, play wrestling, leap frog, tug-of-war, crawling under couch cushions, jumping on the bed and crashing, pushing someone on a swing.
- Cooking tasks: Stirring, rolling/kneading dough, scooping dough, carrying a load of dishes to the table, making hamburgers
- Picking up toys and placing them in a basket being carried around the room

Vestibular

Vestibular input (the sense of movement, centered in the inner ear) can be obtained by spinning and swinging or any type of movement.

- Hanging upside down
- Rolling down a hill
- Ride a roller coaster
- Swinging (spinning and linear)
- Merry-go-rounds
- Cartwheels/summersaults

Tactile

Tactile input is the sense of touch and includes texture, temperature, pressure, and more. The tactile system includes not only the skin covering your body but also inner skin linings such as inside the mouth.

- Drink carbonated water or drinks
- Shaving cream, sand, soap play
- Mix cookie dough and cake batter with hands
- Rice or bean bins
- Play-doh
- Eat frozen foods (popsicles, fruit, ice cream)
- Dress up with different textures include make-up and face paint
- Gardening
- Write on sandpaper

Auditory

Auditory input is what we hear and is connected with the vestibular sense.

- Go outside to listen to the sounds of nature. Have your child identify everything he/she hears
- Play a listening game
- White noise machine
- Listen to music during activities
- Encourage child to play a musical instrument
- Let your child control the volume on the radio

Visual

If your child is visually distractible, simplify the visual field in his home or school environment for a calming effect. If your child seems “visually tuned- out,” add bright colored objects to attract visual attention.

- Hide clutter in bins or boxes or behind curtains or doors,-- a simple, solid color curtain hung over a bookshelf instantly reduces visual clutter
- Use solid rugs instead of patterned ones and solid colored walls
- Have child sit in the front of the classroom and away from windows

- Avoid toys, clothes, towels, etc., in colors that your child finds stress-inducing such as bright orange, yellow, and red.

Smell

If your child has sensory concerns; certain odors can stimulate, calm, or send him into sensory overload.

- Explore scents with your child to find the one that works best to meet your goal (calming or awakening)—Lavender, vanilla, rose are generally calming—Peppermint and lemon are usual awakenings
- Play a smelling game. Have your child close his/her eyes and try to identify smells.

Taste

Taste input is strongly influenced by smell.

- Strong tastes can stimulate the mouth and make him/her more willing to try new foods. Before presenting new foods, let the child have on peppermint, sour gummy bear, or other strong flavored food.
- If your child does not have a strong negative reaction to refined sugar, get an assortment of flavored jellybeans. Eat one at a time and have him/her guess the flavor
- Allow your child to help with cooking meals; children are more likely to try new foods if they help prepare it.
- Always play with your food. Make the experience fun!