



Sensory Diets



What is a Sensory Diet?



Activities that are part of a child's daily routine that help the child reach and maintain optimal level of arousal (energy) during his/her day, promoting self-regulation and behavioral organization. These activities are meant to impact the central nervous system and can be alerting or calming for the child.

There are seven primary sensory systems that take in information daily from our bodies and our environment. The central nervous system processes these inputs in order to produce an adaptive response. Some responses are more appropriate than others. The goal of a sensory diet is to provide the right amount of sensory input in attempt to adjust the neurological system and help the child to produce a more appropriate adaptive response in order to function at his/her optimal level.

To develop a sensory diet, take note of what the child seeks and avoids through use of the Sensory Profile and clinical observations. Note how those things / activities impact the child's ability to be self-regulated and organized. Every sensory diet should be individualized for each child's specific needs. It should be repeated multiple times throughout the day, monitored by a professional frequently and changed as necessary.

Listed below are sample activity ideas for each sensory system that typically help to increase alertness, calm or organize; however, the effects of such activities (if any) vary greatly from child to child and are dependent on a multitude of factors, including how often the activities in the diet are performed, sleep habits, nutritional intake, developmental changes and environment.

1 Sensory Diets



VESTIBULAR

Movement Sense

Receptors in the inner ear provide information about our body's movement. They tell us if we are moving or staying still, the direction and speed of movement, and where we are moving in relation to the surrounding space.

SAFETY FIRST: ALWAYS use caution when using movement activities in therapy and monitor for changes in skin color, signs of nausea and changes in heart rate or breathing. Stop immediately if any of these occur). *It is often recommended that vestibular input be followed by proprioceptive input.*

Alerting Activities

Typically involve movements that are fast, arrhythmic and nonlinear.

- Swinging on any type of swing at a rapid speed or in a rotary motion

SAFETY FIRST: DO NOT spin a child with Epilepsy or a seizure disorder as it may cause a seizure

- Rapid movements forward, backward and side-to-side while seated on a therapy ball
- Bouncing or jumping rapidly on a therapy ball or trampoline
- Rapid and nonlinear movements on a scooter board
- Sliding rapidly down a slide
- Squatting down and standing up
- Dragging the child on a blanket in a rapid and arrhythmic motion
- Rolling rapidly in a tunnel
- Spinning the child on a dizzy disc or sit-and-spin

SAFETY FIRST: DO NOT spin a child with Epilepsy or a seizure disorder as it may cause a seizure

- Jumping rapidly up and down or in a circle
- Jumping rope
- Windmills
- Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes song
- Log rolling rapidly

Calming Activities

Typically involve movements that are slow, rhythmic and linear.

- Swinging in a slow and linear motion in a front to back direction (prone, supine or sitting on a platform swing, prone or supine in a hammock swing, sitting in the tire swing, sitting on the flexion swing, holding onto the trapeze swing, etc.)
- Rocking slowly in prone on a therapy ball in a front to back direction
- Rocking slowly side-to-side in a hammock
- Dragging or sliding the child on a blanket in a slow and straight motion
- Rocker ball - have the child hold their knees to the chest with their arms, rock backwards onto the floor and back up to sitting, repeat.
- Rocking side-to-side or front-to-back on a rocker board
- Roll the child slowly in the tunnel
- Yoga poses such as cat/cows
- Log rolling gently back and forth

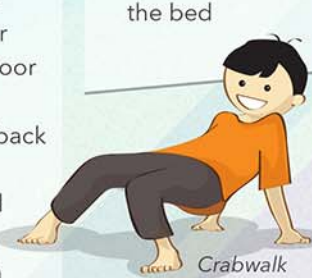
Organizing Activities

Typically involve heavy work)

- Bear walk
- Crab walk
- Crawl in 4-point
- Tall kneel walk
- Walk while holding, carrying, pushing or pulling something weighted or heavy (is: backpack, bag, vest, stroller, wagon, vacuum, wheelbarrow, etc.)
- Stomping
- Tug of war
- Propelling self with arms on a scooter board
- Climbing activities
- Crashing into pillows, the couch or the bed



Tug of war



Crabwalk



Jumping rapidly on a trampoline

Proprioception

Position Sense

Information from the muscles and joints provides us with the position of our body parts and their relationship to each other and space in order to allow us to plan and regulate our movements (general body awareness). *It is often recommended that proprioceptive input follow vestibular input.*

Heavy work: Maximizing input to the joints -- typically organizing.

Organizing Activities

- Teach the child how to perform wall or chair push ups
- Squish the child with objects such as bean bags, steam roll them with a therapy ball, roll them tightly in a blanket (with close supervision for safety and to ensure the blanket is not over their head or near their neck), give them a tight bear hug, squish them with your hands, or teach them how to squeeze themselves
- Yoga for Children, such as the downward dog pose
- Play catch with a weighted ball (no heavier than 5 pounds)
- Provide a weighted or compression vest or lap pad if appropriate (SAFETY FIRST: ALWAYS follow the rule of starting weighted objects at 2.5% of the child's body weight and gradually increasing up to a maximum of 10% of the child's body weight. Weighted vests or clothing are not to be worn during physical activity or for longer than 30 minutes at a time. Ensure that compression vests are not strapped too tightly).
- Animal walks: bear, crab, dog, etc.
- Crawl in 4-point
- Tall kneel walk
- Walk while holding, carrying, pushing or pulling something heavy or weighted
- Crashing onto pillows, bean bags, the couch or a bed
- Cleaning or erasing chalkboards, cleaning windows or mirrors



Pushing heavy weight



Animal walks



Chair push ups



Carrying heavy load

TACTILE

Touch Sense

Information from the skin tells us about the texture/shape/size of objects, helps alert us to threats, define our body boundaries and increases body awareness.

Alerting Activities

Typically involve light touch, cool or cold temperatures, unexpected touch and novel fidgets.

- Run a cotton ball along the child's skin
- Tickle the child using feathers or string (if it does not bother them)
- Place a cold pack on the child's neck, inside of their elbow or back of their knees

SAFETY FIRST: ONLY do this if they indicate it is comfortable and ALWAYS place a towel or medium layer between the pack and the skin and ALWAYS monitor their skin for unexpected or atypical changes

- Place the index finger and thumb of one hand on either side of the child's cervical spine and lightly run your fingers down to the lower thoracic spine
- Provide the child with a novel fidget toy
- Play in sand, rice, beans or dried pasta
- Play with shaving cream
- Play in cold water
- Vibrations in an arrhythmic or un-predictable pattern wherever comfortable for the child, such as back, arms, legs, head, etc. (ie: on pulse mode or random - use massagers, jiggle balls, jigglers, vibrating pens)
- Cool shower or pool
- Gently wipe face with a cool cloth
- Air conditioning



Fidget toy

Calming Activities

Typically involve firm touch, expected or anticipated touch, neutral warmth or comfortable heat and familiar fidgets.

- Deep pressure using the hands, objects or self, such as squishing with bean bags, have the child lie flat in prone and roll them out with a therapy ball (avoiding the head, face, neck and private areas), wrap the child in a blanket tightly and apply gentle pressure to "squish" them

SAFETY FIRST: DO NOT place the blanket over the child's head, face or neck), squeeze the child's limbs with your hands with a pressure that they indicate is comfortable, teach the child how to squeeze themselves

- Tell the child what you are going to do before you do it: "I am going to squeeze your arms in my hands like this..."
- Use a Body Sock
- Play in warm water
- Deep touch massage with lotion - stroke limbs from proximal to distal with a comfortable medium pressure
- Place a warm pack on the child's back whilst they are lying in prone

SAFETY FIRST: ONLY do this if they indicate it is comfortable and ALWAYS have a towel or medium layer between the pack and the skin and ALWAYS monitor their skin for unexpected or atypical changes

- Use vibrations in a rhythmic or predictable pattern wherever comfortable for the child, such as back, arms, legs, head, etc. (can use massagers, jiggle balls, jigglers, vibrating pens)
- Warm bath
- Warm blankets

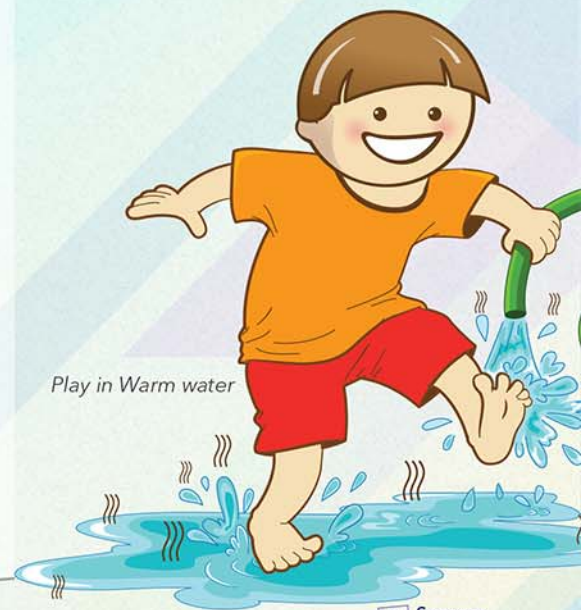
Organizing Activities

Typically involve deep touch and proprioception.

- Deep pressure using the hands, objects or self, such as squishing with bean bags, have the child lie flat in prone and roll them out with a therapy ball (avoiding the head, face, neck and private areas), wrap the child in a blanket tightly and apply gentle pressure to "squish" them

SAFETY FIRST: DO NOT place the blanket over the child's head, face or neck), squeeze the child's limbs with your hands with a pressure that they indicate is comfortable, teach the child how to squeeze themselves

- Joint compressions
- Animal walks: bear, crab, dog, etc.



Play in Warm water

4 Sensory Diets

VISUAL SENSE

The visual system allows us to respond to things seen. It is the sense we use for understanding the relationship between people and objects. It puts the environment into perspective for us and precedes auditory development by building concepts and perceptual abilities. Vision also plays an important role in attention and social interactions.

Alerting Activities

Typically bright lights, contrasting colors, unexpected sights, fast-paced objects in motion, use of peripheral vision.

- Toys with flashing lights

SAFETY FIRST: DO NOT use flashing lights with children with Epilepsy or seizure disorders as they may cause a seizure

- Provide items in the environment or toys / games with bright and contrasting colors
- Play with mechanical toys / toys that move, such as remote controlled cars, wind-up toys, etc.
- Place items around the environment that require peripheral vision
- Play hand-eye games: catch, slap jack, etc.

Calming Activities

Typically dim lights, items moving in repetitive / predictable motions (lava lamp, fish tank, etc.), unchanging stimuli, subdued patterns.

- Low lighting
- Use blue light bulbs
- Use soft changing lights (ie: the type you plug in and slowly and rhythmically change colors or brightness, but are primarily dim)
- Provide the child with a lava lamp, fish tank, water tube, stick of bubbles you can see into, etc.
- Provide items in the environment with warm and neutral colors
- Keep items in the environment to a minimum

Organizing Activities

Typically involves picture schedules, visual boundaries, visual cues, limiting visual clutter, limit fast-paced TV, use of visual timers.

- Create visual schedules for daily routines and activities
- Use highlighter or bolded borders to create visual boundaries on paper
- Use tape, streamers, stuffed animals, pillows, etc. to create visual boundaries in space / a room
- Limit visual clutter in work / homework spaces
- When watching television or items on the iPad / iPhone, provide programs that are slower paced, organized and incorporate complimentary colors and music



Ball catching



Fish Tank



Visual Schedules

Auditory

Sound Sense

The auditory system allows us to respond to things heard. The sounds we hear give us information about language, affect how we interact with the environment and impact our ability to maintain an appropriate level of arousal/energy.

Alerting Activities

Sounds that are arrhythmic, short in duration, novel, loud)

Incorporate the following into a comprehensive sensory diet in therapy sessions and school and home programs to help alert the child:

- Alarms (fire, phone, clock)
- Buzzers
- Horns (car, fire truck)
- Rock music
- Some pop or rap music
- Any music that is played at a louder volume
- Fast paced music with an arrhythmic beat

Calming Activities

Sounds that are rhythmic, long in duration, familiar, soft)

Incorporate the following into a comprehensive sensory diet in therapy sessions and school and home programs to help calm the child:

- Nature sounds (waterfalls, rain, crickets, bird songs)
- Nursery Rhymes
- Classical music
- Jazz music
- Opera music
- Some pop or rap music



Nursery Rhymes



Alarm

Olfactory

Smell Sense

The sense of smell processes odors and can distinguish between thousands of scents. The sense of smell combines with taste information in the brain to create the sensation of flavor. Specific tastes/scents impact our arousal level and organization of behavior.

Alerting Activities

Typically strong smelling, sour, bitter, minty

Incorporate the following into a comprehensive sensory diet in therapy sessions and school and home programs to help alert the child:

- Flower (perfumes, air fresheners)
- Citrus
- Spearmint
- Peppermint
- Menthol
- Smoke / Fire

Calming Activities

Typically smells warm, sweet

Incorporate the following into a comprehensive sensory diet in therapy sessions and school and home programs to help calm the child:

- Bread
- Baked goods
- Savory cooking / foods
- Lavender
- Perfumes
- Coffee

GUSTATORY

The Sense of Taste

The primary oral motor mechanism is the suck / swallow / breathe (SSB) synchrony. This involves the rhythmical, coordinated pattern of sucking, swallowing and breathing. An intact SSB is critical to many elements of sensorimotor and cognitive development. It often functions as an organizer for neuromotor behavior.

SAFETY FIRST: Use extreme caution when incorporating foods into a sensory diet - make sure you have inquired about dietary restrictions from the Pediatrician or RD (ie: NPO, thickened liquids, aspiration risks, etc.) and ENSURE that ALL foods are developmentally appropriate for the child (ie: if the child is low oral tone, do not give them an item they cannot chew and may choke on, etc).

Alerting Activities

Typically items that are cold, sour, bitter / tart, spicy, minty, crunchy, sticky.

- Cold: ice water, popsicles, ice cream, slushies, sorbet, ice cubes, cold beverages
- Sour: Sour Patch candies, some juices and lemonades, sour apples, sour cream
- Bitter / Tart: Lemonhead candies, apple juice, pineapple juice, grapefruit juice, citrus fruits
- Spicy: Cinnamon flavored foods and candies, pepper, spices
- Minty: mints, gum, candies, certain teas
- Crunchy: pretzels, crackers, chips, apple slices
- Sticky: peanut butter, caramel



Cold Beverage

Ice Cream, Popsicles



Pretzels

Calming Activities

Typically items that are warm, smooth, sweet.

- Warm: tea, milk, soup, savory foods, cooked / steamed vegetables
- Smooth: smoothies / juice, thickened liquids, mashed potatoes, noodles, soft cooked fish
- Sweet: baked goods, chocolate, candies, teas, fruits



Baked goods

Milk



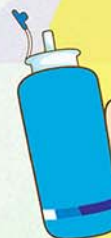
Blowing bubbles

Organizing Activities

Typically items that are chewy, non-food items (pulling or chewing resistive items), blowing, sucking, 10 deep breaths.

- Chewy: gum, peanut butter (just a spoonful by itself), candies, beef jerky
- Non-food items: chewy tube, jigglers, water bottle, straw
- Blowing: bubbles, whistles, through a straw (into a liquid or cotton ball races), a windmill or a balloon
- Sucking: through a straw, a water bottle, a sucker or popsicle or trying to get pieces of tissue paper or cotton balls close to you

Suck through a water bottle



GUSTATORY

The Sense of Taste

The primary oral motor mechanism is the suck / swallow / breathe (SSB) synchrony. This involves the rhythmical, coordinated pattern of sucking, swallowing and breathing. An intact SSB is critical to many elements of sensorimotor and cognitive development. It often functions as an organizer for neuromotor behavior.

SAFETY FIRST: Use extreme caution when incorporating foods into a sensory diet - make sure you have inquired about dietary restrictions from the Pediatrician or RD (ie: NPO, thickened liquids, aspiration risks, etc.) and ENSURE that ALL foods are developmentally appropriate for the child (ie: if the child is low oral tone, do not give them an item they cannot chew and may choke on, etc).

Alerting Activities

Typically items that are cold, sour, bitter / tart, spicy, minty, crunchy, sticky.

- Cold: ice water, popsicles, ice cream, slushies, sorbet, ice cubes, cold beverages
- Sour: Sour Patch candies, some juices and lemonades, sour apples, sour cream
- Bitter / Tart: Lemonhead candies, apple juice, pineapple juice, grapefruit juice, citrus fruits
- Spicy: Cinnamon flavored foods and candies, pepper, spices
- Minty: mints, gum, candies, certain teas
- Crunchy: pretzels, crackers, chips, apple slices
- Sticky: peanut butter, caramel



Cold Beverage

Ice Cream, Popsicles



Pretzels

Calming Activities

Typically items that are warm, smooth, sweet.

- Warm: tea, milk, soup, savory foods, cooked / steamed vegetables
- Smooth: smoothies / juice, thickened liquids, mashed potatoes, noodles, soft cooked fish
- Sweet: baked goods, chocolate, candies, teas, fruits



Baked goods

Milk



Blowing bubbles

Organizing Activities

Typically items that are chewy, non-food items (pulling or chewing resistive items), blowing, sucking, 10 deep breaths.

- Chewy: gum, peanut butter (just a spoonful by itself), candies, beef jerky
- Non-food items: chewy tube, jigglers, water bottle, straw
- Blowing: bubbles, whistles, through a straw (into a liquid or cotton ball races), a windmill or a balloon
- Sucking: through a straw, a water bottle, a sucker or popsicle or trying to get pieces of tissue paper or cotton balls close to you

Suck through a water bottle



7 Sensory Diets

****REMINDER:** while the above activities are TYPICALLY in the suggested categories listed, it is important to remember that every person is different and processes sensory input differently, and therefore, an item that is typically alerting for most people, may be calming to someone else and an activity that is typically calming for most people may be alerting for others.

Dynamics Success Centre
583 Orchard Road #07-02/03, Forum The Shopping Mall
Singapore 238884
Tel: 6100 9235 | Fax: 6234 1956
Email: success@dynamics.com.sg

Affiliated with:



Copyright © 2014 | Dynamics Success Centre Pte Ltd. All rights reserved.