

SENSORY DIETS

Definition: 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 impact the central nervous system and can be alerting or calming for the child.

To develop a sensory diet, parents and therapists take note of what the child seeks and avoids, and how those things/activities impact the individual's ability to be self-regulated and organized. Listed below are activities that typically increase alertness, calm or organize people; however, there are variations from person to person. Some activities may promote disorganization; talk to your therapist about these.

There are seven primary sensory systems that impact a child's development. A sensory diet provides the right amount of sensory input for re-adjusting the neurological system and helps the child to function at his/her optimal level.

1.) VESTIBULAR SYSTEM: 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.

MOVE*

ALERTING	CALMING	ORGANIZING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fast• Arrhythmic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow• Rhythmic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Heavy work

2.) PROPRIOCEPTIVE SYSTEM: Information from the muscles and joints provides us with the position of our body parts and their relationship to each other (general body awareness).

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

3.) TACTILE SYSTEM: 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.

TOUCH*

ALERTING	CALMING	ORGANIZING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light touch • Cool or cold temperatures • Unexpected touch • Novel fidgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm touch • Expected touch • Neutral warmth or heat • Familiar fidgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep touch • Weighted blankets, etc.

4.) AUDITORY SYSTEM: The sounds we hear both give us information about language and impact our ability to maintain an appropriate level of arousal/energy.

LISTEN*

ALERTING	CALMING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrhythmic • Short duration • Novel • Loud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythmic • Long duration • Familiar • Soft

5. & 6.) TASTE & SMELL SYSTEM: Specific tastes/scents impact our arousal level and organization of behavior.

PUT SOMETHING IN YOUR MOUTH OR IN YOUR SPACE*

ALERTING	CALMING	ORGANIZING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cold • Sour/tart • Spicy • Minty • Crunchy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm • Smooth • Sweet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chewy • Sour • Non-food items for resistive blowing, sucking and chewing • 10 deep breaths

7.) VISUAL SYSTEM: Vision is considered the body's top intelligence gatherer. Not only does it give us information about the world around us, but it also plays an important role in attention and social interactions.

LOOK*

ALERTING	CALMING	ORGANIZING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bright lights • Contrasting colors • Unexpected sights • Peripheral vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dim light • Repetitive/predictable motion (lava lamp or fish tank) • Unchanging stimuli or subdued patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture schedules • Visual boundaries • Limiting visual clutter • Limit fast-paced TV • Visual timers

*Information taken from "Take Five!", Williams and Shellenberger