

Basic Sensory Diet information and activity ideas for self-isolation and social distancing

A sensory diet is sensory based activities that are planned throughout the day with the aim of you child regulating him/herself and being calm and alert so they can engage in the activities of the day.

We all use sensory strategies to help us cope with stressful situations. For example, many of us may display some sensory based behaviours when nervous e.g. when going for a job interview. Going for a swim or a run on the morning of this occasion may help in reducing stress, going for a swim the night before may help in having a better night's sleep. Practising interview questions before the interview is kind of like a social story. Having some sort of reward afterwards. We can also put some strategies in to place within the interview – clapping our hands tightly, having a drink to hand, taking a pen and paper in as a fidget toy, crossing our legs and arms to gain proprioception.

A sensory diet is not a reward; it is an essential part of a child's day. For example, think about why we eat breakfast – would breakfast be a good reward if you have done well at school?

A sensory diet consists of:

- “**Main Courses**” – Breakfast, lunch and dinner - longer periods of structured movement, deep pressure and heavy work.
- “**Snacks**” – brief activities for completing at desk, during lessons, when anxious.

What are the problems with going on a diet?

- Sticking to it. Initial motivation can dwindle. Highlight a few activities and stick to those around key times of difficulty during the day.

Examples of sensory diets in action:

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLpepco5Rjg
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=hF5tD4e30UQ

Monitoring your child will help in thinking through peak times of difficulty for him/her and when he/she may need sensory strategies to help him/her cope throughout his/her day. For example:

- Change / transitions.
- Social situations.
- Difficulty planning out of a situation.
- Demands of the situation.
- Fatigue / time spent in that environment.
- Previous experiences that day.
- Personal care.

- When putting together a sensory diet for your child it is important to observe what he/she is doing e.g. is he/she providing ideas about what he/she needs or what he/she is seeking.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the sensory diet on your child and make changes as required.
- Have a sensory diet recipe file.
 - Sometimes you want something new and exciting; sometimes you crave something comforting and familiar.
 - Involve your child in choosing things for his/her sensory diet.
- Proactively your child's sensory needs either before, after or within an activity or all three.
- Movement breaks as part of a sensory diet should be completed regularly.
- Factors to improve and develop a sensory diet:
 - Monitor – record behaviour changes and any improvements seen in either the activity you want your child to do, or reducing the behaviour that you don't want to see.
 - Consider intensity of activity.
 - Consider the duration of an activity.
 - **This is a trial and error approach not a prescription.**

Time and frequency:

Implementation of the diet should be completed at regular intervals throughout the day. For example:

Breakfast > Snack > Lunch > Snack > Dinner > Snack

OR

Before, during and after functional tasks

A timer can be used alongside a visual schedule or now and next chart to indicate what activities your child is expected to participate in. For example, completing a **therapy ball task for 10 minutes** followed by a 10 minute fine motor task, with a **short movement break for 2 minutes**, in the middle of the fine motor task and followed by **a 10 minute play on a trampoline**. A now and next visual timetable would be appropriate to use to implement both the sensory diet and fine/gross motor activities.



REMEMBER:

Your child may require "snacks" during tasks and activities therefore it is important to monitor his/her responses and act on them.

Environmental factors

The environment in which your child is in should be taken into consideration as part of his/her sensory diet. It is important to consider the following that may have an impact:

- Busy/cluttered walls.
- Background noise.
- Lighting.
- Physical layout of the room.
- Consistency/predictability of the visual environment.

The environment should aim to support your child in knowing what to attend to and what is required for the task at hand. Having structure within the environment so that there is order can be helpful when implementing sensory diets.

Calming and alerting activities:

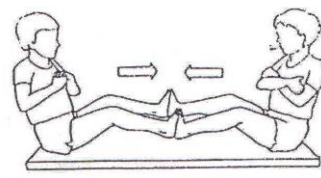
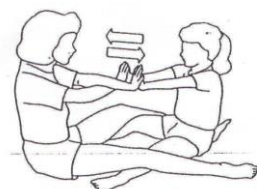
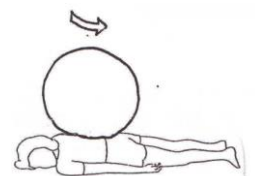
Proprioception provides us with information regarding:

- Our awareness of body position.
- Knowing where our body parts are in space and in relation to each other.
- Timing and force needed for activities.
- Can have calming, organizing and focusing benefits.
- Can be used as wake up exercises.

Proprioception can be both calming and alerting to the nervous system and is the go to tool for sensory diet activities for any child. You child may present in different ways.

Your child can try any of the following activities. These can be incorporated at home as either sensory **main courses** or **sensory snacks**:

- Lifting books and toys back onto shelves.
- Helping with chores around the home – washing up, filling/emptying a dishwasher, hoovering, dusting.
- Lying on tummy on the floor to watch TV – this is a good anti-gravity position and gives heavy work to a lot of muscles!
- Taking bags of rubbish to the dustbin.
- Taking a dog for a walk – with social distancing.
- Massage – especially on the back.
- A warm bath with foam bubbles, pulling plungers off the bottom of the bath.
- A 'hot dog'. The child lies down on a jumbo cushion or pillow (either on their front or back) and another cushion is placed on top (not on the face) and gentle firm pressure can be given by an adult in addition to the weight of the cushion (alternatively roll a ball/ space hopper on the child's back).
- Being rolled up tightly in a duvet cover or blanket.
- Squeezing stress balls, hand toys and play dough.
- Wearing a heavy coat and hat (when weather is appropriate).
- Pressing hands/feet together or pushing with hands against the wall (arms straight).



- Use small bubble wrap paper, pop the bubbles with thumb and fingers.
- Sitting on a therapy ball or space hopper and bouncing up and down or lying over the ball and rocking back and forth.
- Slow deep breathing.

- Swinging, playing on a climbing frame, bouncing on a trampoline if there are any available in your garden or local park (please remember to wash hands and social distance if in a park).
- Riding a bike, scooter and setting up a course to go around in the garden or street.
- Garden Olympics – setting up “events” such as egg and spoon race, 3 legged race, football etc. and competing against family. Your child can make medals for those who win events and have opening/closing ceremonies.
 - <https://www.greenthumb.co.uk/blog/bring-the-summer-olympics-to-your-back-garden> for ideas for garden Olympics.
- Garden sports – football, badminton, tennis, handball, volleyball.
- Sitting room exercises – star jumps, roly-polies, hopping on the spot, jumping on the spot, crawling around obstacles, chair/wall press-ups etc.
- Play wrestling.
- Wheelbarrow walks - Child walks on hands while adult supports hips or legs.
- Big ball play.
- Bumping down stairs on bottom and climbing up again.
- Playing tug of war.
- Catching and throwing heavy weighted balls.
- Kicking a ball
- ‘Squash’ the child with a space hopper or large ball, or bury them under a pile of cushions and press down.
- Play ‘backpacking’ and place bags of beans or rice in child-sized backpack. Pretend to be climbing mountains and jumping off rocks at the park, garden or living room. You can also have a picnic following this.
- Turtle Race: Place a large beanbag on your child’s back. They then crawl around circuit, slowest wins.
- Animal Walks: Walk or move like an animal e.g. snake, quiet mouse, loud elephant, big bear, hopping frog, etc.
- Roller Coaster: Child lies on stomach over large ball/space hopper with hands on floor and gradually walks forward. When the child collapses, ball is rolled over them and you start again.
- Bulldozers: A group of children i.e. siblings can use body parts to push items, e/g. some gym mats in a pile using heads, feet and hands.
- Pillow Crashing: Encourage child to jump into a pile of large cushions.
- Have the child close his/her eyes and ‘feel’ where his legs, hands, arms, etc. are. Ask if they are up or down. See if the child can get into different positions without looking, such as roll into a ball, touch his/her nose, make a circle with his/her arms, make an ‘x’ with arms and legs, etc.

Other tips:

- Give the child extra proprioceptive input when he/she is learning a new skill. For example, wearing a lightweight weighted cuff when a child is trying to throw a ball may give a little extra feedback about the position of his/her arm.
- Other examples include practising letters, shapes or numbers by making them in playdough or another firm mixture, placing your hands on his/her hips or shoulders and providing gentle pressure when the child is learning a new motor skill such as climbing upstairs or skating and moving the child through an action and providing gentle resistance to his/her movements so he/she can ‘feel’ it more easily.
- When the child is involved in sedentary activities such as doing homework, reading and playing board or video games, encourage him/her to take frequent, short

movement breaks. Insisting that the child finishes all the homework in one sitting is usually counter-productive.

- Choose family activities that involve appropriate kinds of movement. Children often find doing something with the family more appealing than doing it alone and the whole family may discover new, healthy activities. Walking, swimming, hiking, horseback riding or playing tennis or cricket are only a few examples of enjoyable family activities.

Please note this is not a prescription and is put together as general information. This can be used with all children, but is beneficial when used in conjunction with a visual schedule.