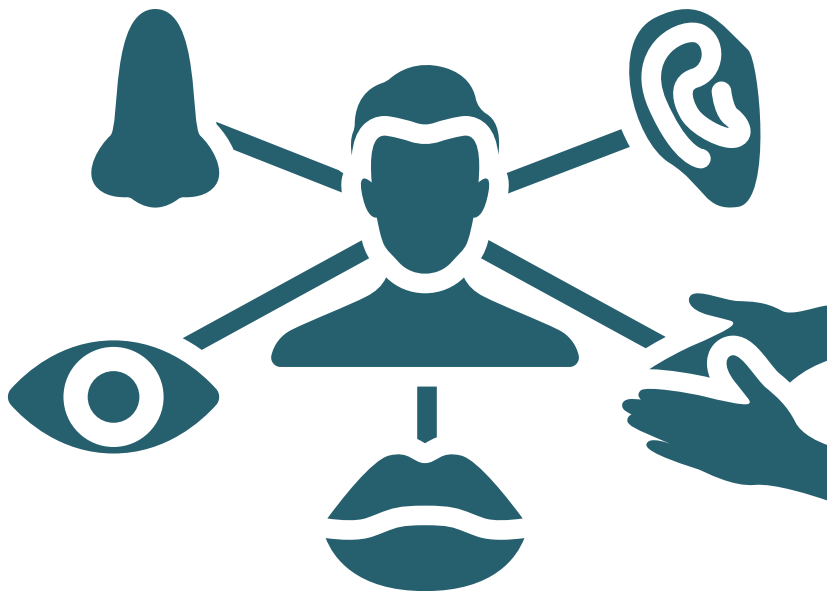


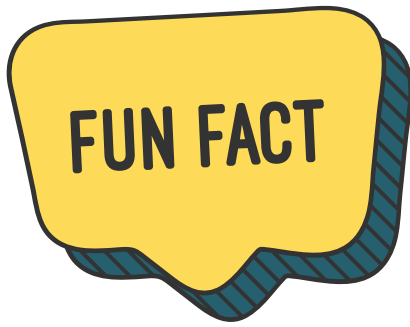
AUTISM & THE SENSES



What are the sensory differences that an autistic individual may experience?

What is Sensory Processing Disorder?

What can we do to help with sensory differences?



We have more than 5 senses! We have 5 basic senses - sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell. But we also have other senses such as interoception (sensing internal things such as pain and temperature) and proprioception (knowing where your limbs are in relation to your body)!

HYPERSENSITIVITY



Over-reactive
senses to an
environment

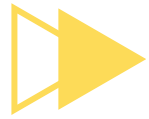
HYPOSENSITIVITY



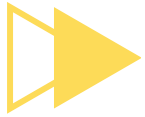
Under-reactive
senses to an
environment

You might be hypersensitive to some senses and hyposensitive to others. Everyone's experiences are different!

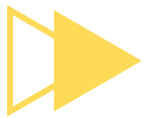
WHAT IS SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER (SPD)?



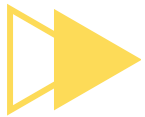
Sensory Processing Disorder is an impairment to way the brain processes sensory information



Sensory Processing Disorder can affect all of your senses, just one sense or a collection of senses



Not every autistic individual has Sensory Processing Disorder, but it thought that about 75% of individuals with autism present with Sensory Processing Disorder as well



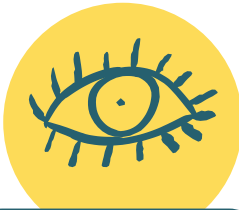
Many people who are not autistic experience Sensory Processing Disorder

SENSORY SEEKING BEHAVIOURS

Some autistic individuals use “sensory seeking” behaviours to help maintain equilibrium through seeking out sensory activities to stimulate under-sensitive senses. Some sensory-seeking behaviours include:

- talking to yourself, singing or making noises
- playing video games or watching action-packed or scary films
- spinning in circles
- doing physical activities such as dancing, rollerblading etc.
- enjoy rollercoasters and high adrenaline activities
- like pressure - tight hugs, weighted blankets, pressure vests
- eating crunchy food or very cold things such as ice

EXAMPLES OF SENSORY DIFFERENCES



SIGHT

- Dislike of bright lights
- Get distracted or distressed due to busy or visually stimulating displays
- Central or periphery vision may be blurred
- Slow reactions to visual stimuli



SOUND

- Dislike of loud or persistent sounds
- Inability to cut out background noise
- Sounds may become distorted
- May hear noises other can't hear
- May not acknowledge sounds
- May make own sounds to stimulate this sense



SMELL

- Interest or distress around strong smells
- Failure to react to strong smells



TOUCH

- Touch may be painful or uncomfortable, such as hugs and personal contact
- Can only tolerate certain textures and materials
- Difficulty with brushing hair, brushing teeth and washing because of sensitivities
- High pain threshold
- Enjoy pressure sense such as weighted blankets and tight hugs



TASTE

- Restricted diet due to sensitivity to strong tastes and flavours
- May only eat certain textures of food
- Like or dislike very spicy foods
- May eat non-edible items (known as Pica)



OTHER

- May find activities involving balance and control, such as sport, difficult
- May get travel sick
- Difficulties with fine motor skills such as tying shoe laces or doing or undoing buttons
- May need to rock or stim to get sensory input
- May get too close to others or bump into people

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP MANAGE THE SENSORY DIFFICULTIES?

- Reduce bright lights
- Wear sunglasses
- Use black out curtains
- Use visual aids to help with communication
- Wear head phones or ear defenders
- Listen to music when feeling distressed
- Use unscented or scented products when washing depending on sensory preference
- Try and create a varied and balanced diet of foods that you can tolerate
- Use weighted-blankets
- Warn people before touching them i.e. before hugging
- Change foods to different textures i.e. puree
- Remove labels from clothes
- Don't disallow stimming - this can be a helpful coping mechanism

SPACE FOR NOTES:

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

It can be useful to complete a sensory profile. This is a where you think about your own unique sensory processing system and needs. It can be useful to identify your sensory needs and think of ways to manage them. This can help avoid sensory overload, anxiety and meltdown.

This leaflet was written by:

Zoe Mitchell

“ As an autistic individual myself, I have created this leaflet from a neurodivergent perspective whilst working for the CASA team. I hope you found it useful and informative. If you have any questions or suggestions, please talk to us! ”