



Sensory Diets

Despite how it sounds, a sensory diet has nothing to do with food. It's actually more like a schedule of activities to help kids with sensory difficulties get through the day.

What is a sensory diet?

Just as your child needs food throughout the course of the day, their need for sensory input must also be met. A “sensory diet” is a carefully designed, personalized activity plan that provides the sensory input a person needs to stay focused and organized throughout the day.

Just as you may jiggle your knee or chew gum to stay awake or soak in a hot tub to unwind, children need to engage in stabilizing, focusing activities too. Infants, young children, teens, and adults with mild to severe sensory issues can all benefit from a personalized sensory diet. Each child has a unique set of sensory needs.

Generally, a child whose nervous system is on “high trigger/too wired” needs more calming input, while the child who is more “sluggish/too tired” needs more arousing input. The great news is that the effects of a sensory diet are usually immediate AND cumulative. Activities that perk up your child or calm him down are not only effective in the moment; they actually help to restructure your child’s nervous system over time so that he is better able to cope with daily demands.

The best and only expert on each of our children is... YOU. YOU know what kinds of behaviours you are seeing. And really, we end up combining what our OT’s do at the clinic with our own observations of what is helpful at home. BE the detective with your child.

FIRST: Study, and maybe write down through the course of a few days? What behaviours you are seeing. Most of you have already written them out, in an attempt to tell us in here, what’s happening at home.

Seeking Behaviour

He spins through the house, crashing into everything!

Seeking Diet Solution

Give him something SAFE to spin and crash on.



He jumps all over the furniture!

Give him a safe space and something to jump on.



Each child is so very different and has different requirements. But if you LOOK at what they are doing... they ARE telling you, in the only way they know how, with their behaviours, what they are needing. Take what they already DO and make it safer. More appropriate. That's the beginning of your sensory diet.

Give them what they are needing, in better, safer, healthier ways. Redirect them to a safer way to get the same input. And make it fun! They'll feel better for being able to do these things for as long as they need to. And you'll be happier NOT yelling "Get OFF my couch!"

Some of our diets are worked right into the day. Like carrying the laundry basket or bringing in the groceries. Measuring out ingredients when we are cooking. Pulling a sibling in a wagon. Swinging. Exercising" with Mom.

Offer different things throughout the day. Keep in mind, you can help them through ALL their senses...

- Is a certain candle soothing to your child? Another alerting?
- Does your child blissfully sit in front of the fish tank, or watch the flames in the fireplace?
- Is a slow walk at sunset calming to them?
- Do they LOVE to be hugged tight, or rolled up in their towel after their bath?
- Does certain music wind them up? And other music make them sleepy or quiet?
- Is white noise calming or irritating?

Observe your child and complete the following tables:

List Some Of The Behaviours You Have Noticed In Your Child:

What Activities Assist Them In Calming And Alerting Them:

See A List Of Sensory Diet Activities Below That Will Assist Your Child With Movement:

The most powerful and satisfying activities include movement, deep pressure and heavy work. It generally provides the most long-lasting impact on the nervous system.

The sensory diet can be a powerful behavioural tool and help prevent challenging behaviours. It's fun and gets everybody moving. Some suggestions are listed below:

- Mini trampoline
- Jumping onto cushions
- Sit n Spins
- Hippity hops
- Weighted objects to play with and throw e.g.heavy bean bags,etc
- Crawling through tunnels or boxes on all fours playing tug of war (can use ropes or old inner tube)
- Tie items with jump rope and pull around the house
- Animal walks
- Spin in a swivel chair
- Blow up/plastic water pools are great sensory bins to fill up with beans, rice or pillows
- Laundry baskets can be used to sit and climb in and out of or to give rides in
- Big inner tubes can be used as mini tramps
- Doing tabletop activities seated on a therapy ball
- Blankets and hammocks can be used for swinging, hiding and rolling
- Tubing material/ spandex can be used for tunnels and giving rides.
- Carrying heavy things such as groceries, water jugs, books, weighted backpacks, etc
- Building a tent/fort with couch cushions and then wrapping up tightly in a blanket inside the fort.

Please Note:

This programme is by no means customised to any specific child. The information is designed to give you more insight into sensory diets. The activities are a guide for you and your children. They are global activity ideas that work with most children.

A qualified occupational therapist can use their advanced training and evaluation skills to develop a good sensory diet for your child, but it's up to you and your child to implement it throughout the course of the day.

If a more personalised sensory diet is needed, please contact the occupational therapist.

Your child will be assessed, and more structured sensory diet with daily activities will be developed.