



Sensory Diet:

What is it and why is it important?

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"The sensory diet is based on the idea that each child needs a certain amount of activity and sensation to be most alert, adaptable, and skillful" -Wilbarger and Wilbarger

Establishing a *Sensory Diet* into your child's daily routines is a strategy for meeting their sensory needs in a way that is meaningful and specific. In the same way that it is difficult for us to concentrate on work when we are starving for a lunch break, feeding your child's sensory appetite takes care of their basic needs so they can be free to engage and excel.

It is important to understand what *sensory processing* is before establishing a sensory diet. When in elementary school, we were taught about our 5 senses (hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touch/tactile). Additionally, we have 2 other senses that we rely heavily on to maintain an ideal state of regulation, our *proprioceptive system* and our *vestibular system*. Below you will be provided with a breakdown of what the proprioceptive and vestibular systems involve. The 4 areas we are going to focus *are: vestibular, proprioception, oral motor, and tactile*.

Here is a breakdown of each of the 4 above mentioned sensory systems:

- **Vestibular (movement)**: The vestibular system affects balance, muscle tone, equilibrium responses, the ability to use both sides of the body together, coordination of head, neck, and eye movements. It plays a role in arousal.
- **Proprioception (deep pressure)**: The proprioceptive system gives the nervous system input on the position of muscles, joints, and tendons. This is important, as it provides the person with information on how far to reach, how much pressure to use, where our body is in space, and what our body scheme (awareness of our body parts and the relationship of those parts to one another and objects) is. It is closely linked to the tactile system.
- **Oral Motor**: Oral motor skills are used to help regulate our state of arousal. Infant and toddlers use sucking as a way to fall asleep or calm down; children and adults may use the oral motor area to concentrate (chew gum, suck through a straw, or bite nails).
- **Tactile (touch)**: The tactile system is designed to alert us to threats, help us with fine motor control, and with social interactions (person space).

A Sensory Diet is comprised of special activities that one can do to help organize a child. Below is a list of activities related to spring time that are specific to the areas mentioned above which can be facilitated to help produce an alerting effect or a calming effect.

Your therapist has recommended establishing a Sensory Diet into your child's daily routine. The activities chosen by your therapist should be designated to certain times of day to improve performance with activities of daily living (daily self-care activities). It is important to emphasize the need to be consistent in completing these activities DAILY to accommodate your child's needs through providing him/her with the sensory experiences that may be hindering involvement in daily living skills.

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Definition of a *sensory diet* and its importance

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Spring Fine Motor activity



Spring Has Sprung!

Gardening is a wonderful activity to engage in with your child to help support a variety of goal areas addressed in occupational therapy. Now that spring is here, it is a perfect time to start working in the garden! Planting in small pots on the balcony or patio is an easy way to get started. Here are some activity ideas for gardening with your child:

- ☼ Plant seeds in small pots: Discuss the steps and materials needed with your child and make a simple list of steps, visual or written. Then your child can practice scooping soil, poking holes in soil with their finger, and picking up small seeds and placing them in the holes. Your child can also practice pouring water from a watering can or small measuring cup in order to water the plant. (BONUS! You can also use this activity to work on your child's language skills! For example, discuss what you are doing each step, ask your child what comes next, describe how each item feels, and recall all the steps you did once your activity is complete.)
- ☼ Cutting flowers from the garden (with supervision) is a great way to practice scissor cutting skills and help with the pruning!
- ☼ Pinching and pulling weeds also helps work on grasp, upper body and hand strength, and visual skills (spotting those weeds in the flower beds!).
- ☼ Growing vegetables (even patio tomatoes in a pot) can be a great way to entice your child to try new foods--- growing veggies themselves is a great sense of pride and accomplishment.
- ☼ Getting messy in the garden is a great way to work on tactile/touch sensitivities- add water to dirt to make mud, play in water, feel and touch a variety of leaves or flower petals to introduce your child to new textures!

There are many good resources on the internet to give you more ideas:

<http://www.kidsgardening.org/family-gardening>

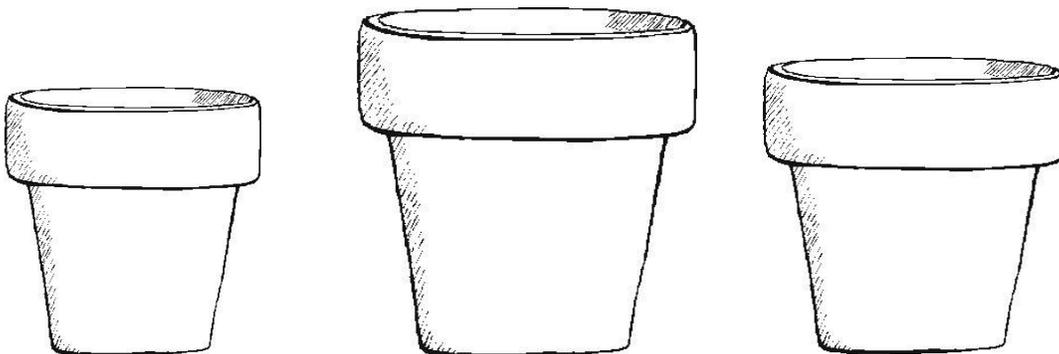
<http://www.danthegardener.co.uk/gardening-for-children.htm>

<http://www.typodermic.com/garden/index.html>

Find more ways to engage kids in the garden! If you don't feel you have a green thumb, you might want to check out Modern Parent Messy Kids for an easy to make your own "veggie garden sensory box" with homemade "veggies" that won't wilt as your child explores and expands their sensory experiences. Go to:

<http://www.modernparentsmessykids.com/2011/05/diy-veggie-garden-sensory-box.html>

Practice fine motor skills by drawing a picture of your plant as it is growing. You may also draw flowers or plants from your garden.



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