

## Creating Your Own “Sensory Diet”

The sensory diet, a term coined by OT Patricia Wilbarger, is a carefully designed, personalized activity schedule that provides the sensory input a person's nervous system needs to stay focused and organized throughout the day. A person whose nervous system is on "high trigger" will need more calming input, while someone who is more "sluggish" will need more arousing input to "jazz" up her nervous system. Infants, young children, teens, and adults can all benefit from a well-designed sensory diet. (<http://www.sensorysmarts.com/diet.html>) A healthy sensory diet can support our best functioning in academics and support our best physical, mental and emotional state of being.

Sensory processing is the “procedure in which we take in sensory messages from our bodies and surroundings. Then we interpret these messages and organize our purposeful responses. This occurs when information about sensations is passed back and forth between the central nervous system (CNS) and nerves in the brain and spinal cord, and the peripheral nervous system with the nerves that are outside the CNS” (Kranowitz, 2004). Sensory intake is happening constantly to each of us as we move through our daily endeavors, and we respond accordingly. We receive all input through our senses, via seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching and through our body centered senses of touch (tactile/protective), movement and gravity (vestibular), and body position (proprioceptive). Each sense acts individually and in union with the others to send us information about our environments and our body in each environment.

To understand how the senses all work together, imagine all that happens within our bodies automatically (if our CNS is intact) when we simply walk up the stairs with our morning cup of coffee. Visually we see the stairs and begin to lift our foot, this involves proprioceptive and vestibular senses as well as tactile. The smell of the coffee is noticed and we take care not to spill it as we ascend. We may hear voices of colleagues, feel our clothes, touch a railing, or have hot coffee slosh onto our hand, yet we continue to shift our weight to lift our legs alternately to continue up the steps. Each sense is called into play and is necessary for successful completion of this activity. In everything we do, messages are constantly being sent and interpreted by our system in order to allow us to proceed successfully.

(<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/Sensory/sensoryIntegrate.html>)

## Auditory

Auditory input is what we hear and is neuroanatomically connected with the vestibular sense. In addition to listening to various types of music, both recorded and live, here are some ways to get calming and organizing auditory input.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Think about your five sensory input modalities: auditory, visual, tactile/kinesthetic, taste, smell. Reflect on your daily life and write a brief description of the kind and quality of input you get through each of your senses. Then come up with two or three ways you can commit to yourself, to develop a healthy personal sensory diet.

Example:

#### **Sensory Input Modality: Auditory**

I have two children and I feel often I am overloaded in this area. There is constant talk, music, TV kinds of noise in the background at home. I go to school and listen to lectures several hours each day. I am very fatigued when I feel overloaded, and I don't process well what I hear.

3 things I can do in my daily life to support balanced auditory input:

- Listen to recordings of nature sounds and classical music specially engineered to promote calming, focus, energy, or creativity. This is the kind of musical recordings we use in the AP class. I will make sure I make the most of this special listening time.
- Get out in nature and listen. Go to the beach or sit still and listen to a thunderstorm or windstorm. If I hear birds singing, can try to identify what direction a given bird is calling from.
- Get a tabletop water fountain to soothe me as I cook, clean, help the kids with homework or do paperwork in the kitchen.

## **Sensory Input Modality: Visual**

## **Sensory Input Modality: Tactile**

(Tactile input is the sense of touch and includes texture, temperature, pressure, and more.)

**Sensory Input Modality: Taste**

**Sensory Input Modality: Smell**