

Sensory Processing Tools for the Mouth

What is sensory processing?

Sensory Processing is the way that our bodies take in information through our senses, and how this information is organised in our central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) in order for us to be able to understand, react and interact appropriately with the world around us.

Oral Motor Sensory Input and Proprioception

Proprioception refers to an awareness of our body position and movement. Sensory information from this system is created by the contraction and stretching of muscles and by the bending, straightening, pulling and compression of joints. Proprioceptive sensory information is important for sensory regulation. The proprioceptive sensory system can also be activated through contraction/stretching of the muscles of the jaw and mouth, for example when chewing. Children, as well as many adults, seek opportunities to chew, for example, chewing on clothes, gum, the ends of pencils/pens etc. Chewing plays an important role in sensory regulation, and therefore supports concentration and attention.

Oral Motor Strategies

- Try and create opportunities throughout the day to provide oral motor activities.
- Incorporate chewy foods throughout the day. Try and offer snacks that require lots of chewing. For example:
 - Carrot sticks
 - Dried fruit
 - Popcorn
 - Bagels
 - Salami sticks
 - Chewing gum. Try several pieces at one time. Nb: it is important to set up rules around chewing gum, and ensure that these are agreed to by all involved!
- Try to provide a range of alternative chewies to reduce the need for chewing on clothes and buttons etc. Following are some websites with different "chewellery" / oral motor options:
 - Sensory Tools (www.sensorytools.net) have a range of 'oral motor' resources, including chewable army dog tags!
 - Also try www.jellystonedesigns.com for other chewellery ideas.
 - Also try www.sensasmart.com.au for a range of "Sensachew" options.
 - Also try the chewable pencil toppers. Available from the Sensory Tools Website.



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