

Sensory needs in times of Corona...

Remember the times when we used to step out from our homes regularly and were exposed to an enormous amount of sensory input from the outside world?

Be it that long tight hug from your loved ones or hustling to get into that crowded metro or that garden-fresh scent setting your mood just about right. Often we did not particularly notice all those different textures or the various smells and sights we were exposed to. Well, all those inputs play a role in our sensory diets.

Yes! Food is not the only diet that our body needs!

When we are awake, our senses are receiving input at all times, and our brain is processing these sometimes beyond our awareness. That is why a smell that you become aware of, suddenly sparks a childhood memory, or the sight of a favorite dish makes you experience the taste and crave and salivate.

However, since the outbreak we are obliged to live in confined spaces, and the amount and nature of sensory input has changed. What impact do you think it has?

Here is an attempt to understand whether all of our sensory needs are being met, and if not, what you can do about it, while still staying indoor.

Here we are sharing few tips which you can follow to enrich your sensory diet-
(There are many other ways too, these are just a start !)

ACTIVE MOVEMENT

- Spend time reading/knitting or while sitting on a rocking chair, or a swing.
- Get in tune with your body and your inner self by doing yoga.
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LvVtTZBaxY>
,
<https://youtu.be/V1HbXt5ZRlg>)

The act of tilting, inverting and rotating the head activates the vestibular system regularly. This is the system that helps us to know our body in space when static and it's balance, direction, speed and smoothness while moving with respect to gravity. It helps us to sit or stand still in a moving car/bus/elevator, to maintain upright posture with movement, to give us automatic self-protective mechanisms with sudden change.



Photo credit: By Ksenia Chernaya, via Pexels

- This could also be done easily by setting aside time for a good dance routine, or some goofy family dancing game, and/or slow dancing and swaying with soft music.
- Get your heart pumping with a set of skipping.
- Play with a balloon: With your children or even with the other child-adult in your life: Play catch and throw, or balance a balloon and cross the room (<https://youtu.be/WB1bTCJnUt0>). Make different rules about keeping the balloon above the level of the head, or head kicks only, or using only feet etc. This ensures that your body has to adopt varied postures, all the while having fun!

Alternative or in some households- currently essential.

-Mopping, wiping walls, dusting and other household chores can also satiate a lot of your sensory needs.

-While mopping or doing these chores, use exaggerated rhythmic movements for examples - do the sweeps in an arc and to a rhythm (link to Ritu's video from Fb)

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Why not entertain ourselves with some recreational activities that can actually boost our sensory diet and activate our systems and at the same time give us the motivation to keep going in these difficult times.

- Play with clay: For the nostalgia to kick in and let your creative pal living inside you come out, mess around with the slime may be.
- Take out those poster colours, spend some time doing finger painting or start making a scrapbook with your little ones or to level up, you can create your own little space for some craft work.
- Knitting, sewing can also potentially address some of your tactile needs when you experience different fabrics and textures. Make sure to not just work with the cloth, but to touch and feel it at various times.
- Brush up your cooking skills. Bake something, knead a dough for cookies or pizza. This will again arouse your senses for touch and texture perception, and registration of pressure you put into making the dough. At the same time the aroma of the cookies or the cake you are making will evoke your olfactory(smell) sense.
- Karaoke/Antakshari time with family can bring immense joy to everyone. So pick up the rhythm and ease your stress with your favourite songs.
- Stimulate your gustatory(taste) senses by putting 2-3 cardamoms or cloves in your mouth or add that pinch of cinnamon to your pancakes! After all

RELAXATION

- Getting yourself a good massage is the easiest way to go about it. Get your family or friends to do “home massage routines”. Different body oils, or even a pleasant moisturiser could increase the input.
- Breathing and breath: Practice deep and aware breathing. Even done for a few minutes two-three times a day this can center you. For added input, use essential oil diffusers or incense sticks to create your aura, and try to do it at a similar time each day to create a rhythm or ritual- and just relax.
- Smell the flowers and leaves, or the soap, even the kitchen spices you are working with every time you get a chance. Pause for a few seconds and actually take in the smell and become aware of it.
- Squeeze that stress ball to combat the stress from the day.
- Bathing: Use bathing time to create a ritual where smell, texture, touch , pressure and temperature all come together in harmony for you. Many people enjoy the cool water, some prefer lukewarm even in summer. Use a soap, and rub or lather it to a point that you like, use different textures to rub down different parts: e.g., a loofah, or a sponge, or a thick towel, you might find that a brush that you might like the feel of. Rub gently or as firmly as you might want on a particular day.

These are only a few suggestions. Feel free to create your own “Sensory diet “. Our quick summary tips are:

- Develop certain routines for this diet daily.
- If you can, use the corners of the house that you don't usually go to.
- Keep each activity Multisensory. Each activity arouses several senses and activates or amplifies certain stimuli. Look for your own happy combination.
- Use the spices and fresh produce from your kitchen.
- Increase your range: The eyes and the ears are not our “only “ senses. (Link to 7 senses)
- Variations: While a rhythm is important, sensory input and stimuli need to be varied, change every other day.

