

The Seven Senses

Taste (Gustatory)



Autistic people experience the world differently from others. Sensory issues arising from autism are a well-known aspect of the condition, and in particular hypersensitivity (increased sensitivity) in one or more senses occurs frequently in autistic people. When you sense the world differently to others you inevitably react and behave differently as well.

Autism affects every person differently and in a way which is unique to that individual person. Similarly, the reactions of everyone on the spectrum are personal and should be supported in a manner that benefits the individual in their own unique way.

Let's take a look at 1 of the seven senses - Taste (gustatory)

Increased sensitivity to taste

Types of issues possible:

- May not be able to tolerate some tastes and flavours.
- Some food smells may be overwhelming.
- May not tolerate certain textures of food.
- May prefer food of a certain colour or temperature.

Potential impacts on life:

- Diet may become too limited to be healthy.
- May be seen as a fussy eater by others without understanding of the condition.
- May stop feeling hunger pangs if frequently put off food and thus not eat enough.
- May only be able to eat and drink from certain containers and cups.

How to help and provide support:

- New foods can be introduced by making them similar in texture and colour to the person's preferred food tastes. (Mash up fruit or vegetables if they prefer smooth foods etc.)
- Social stories. Write a short info sheet that puts the food into a very positive light that will encourage the person to want to try it! Use the person's motivator within the storyline to engage their attention further
e.g. Use a Thomas the Tank Engine plate to offer the food.



- Desensitisation (a behavioural technique). Try putting a small piece of 'new food' near the person's plate until gradually it can be placed on the plate. This could take several days or even weeks. Eventually the individual may try it.
- Alternate mouthfuls of a favourite food with mouthfuls of the new food. This can work well with children or older individuals. Keep it positive and treat it as a fun game.
- Most of all be positive and be patient and enable the person to feel in control. We all need to feel in control of our lives.

Reduced sensitivity to taste

Types of issues possible:

- May prefer foods that are very strong tasting or spicy.
- May pick up and eat or explore with their mouths non-edible items, including everyday things such as grass, stones, soil and faeces (known as pica).

Potential impacts on life

- Risk to health of eating non-food items.
- Diet may become too limited to be healthy.
- May want to eat constantly to stimulate taste sensations.

How to help and provide support:

- Keep the person safe by avoiding exposure to harmful items.
- Offer substitutes for non-foods, for example twigs in place of wood.
- Use distractions when non-food may be eaten, such as fidget toys.

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