

Sensory strategies for students who may have sensory processing difficulties

Our brains thrive on movement to help us to attend to and process sensory information.

These are most beneficial when incorporated into your daily routine on a regular basis. 15-20 minute of heavy work can be beneficial for 2-3 hours after, so try to build activities into your day morning, noon and afternoon/night.

- ❖ Most sporting activities are beneficial to the nervous system and can include:
 - Gym work, push ups, chin ups, weight lifting, kettle bell exercises, boxercise.
 - Rock climbing, bouldering.
 - Trampolining, gymnastics, dancing.
 - Yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi, karate.
 - Cycling, swimming, rowing, horse riding.
 - Go for a brisk walk. Walk up and down hills if possible.
 - Gardening – digging, pushing the wheelbarrow, raking leaves are all great activities (and useful too)!
 - Clean and polish the cars or wash the downstairs windows at home.
 - Have a sneaky turn on the swings at the park (but don't push the children off to do so)!

During college or school our bodies have to process lots of sensory information and use it to respond to our environment. There is usually lots of noise and movement from other students, visually stimulating classrooms (with posters on the walls, information on hand-outs, instructions on the whiteboards) but not movement and this can be too much for our nervous systems to cope with even before we have to sit still to listen, concentrate and complete our work. If you are feeling anxious or finding it difficult to sit still and concentrate, the following may help; Pick one or two things to trial at a time and if it doesn't work, try something else. Also be aware that we all have good days so what works on one day may not work on others.

- Chair pull-ups –. When seated, hold onto the chair seat and pull up (as though trying to lift the chair). Hold for 10 seconds then release.
- Table push ups – in standing, rest hands on table and slowly lower straight body towards table and back again. Make your movements as slow as possible.
- Head/neck compressions – clasp fingers together, place palm down on top of head and push down firmly with straight neck. Hold for a short period.
- Before going to a lesson, walk up and down a staircase a few of times.
- If possible, use the gym at lunch time.
- Carry your equipment in a rucksack on your back.
- Sip cold water during the day. Suck activated sports drinks bottles are useful.
- Chewing, sucking or chewing are activities we can use to calm or alert our nervous system so try the following through the day.
 - Chewing gum, bagel, dried mango.
 - Drink through a narrow straw.
 - Suck hard boiled sweets, mints or a lollipop.

- Crunchy food such as carrot sticks or apples.
- If you find that the classroom is too noisy, ask your tutor if you can wear headphones.
- Sometimes 'fiddling' with an object which gives resistance (pull/stretch or squeeze) can aid concentration. Use a thick elastic band, blue tack, hairband, piece of elastic exercise band or stress ball.
- Before writing, try squeezing hands together in a fist then opening them quickly. Link fingers together and pull hands apart (maintaining link) then push palms together.
- Wearing tight clothing under clothing can provide increased proprioceptive feedback which can help to calm your nervous system. You could try wearing compression sports clothing, leotard, tight leggings, sports socks or a tight fitting hat. Try putting on just before lessons you find it hard to concentrate for.
- At home, try lying on your stomach on the floor to watch television or sitting on a large exercise ball at the table to complete homework.
- Find a quiet area to sit perhaps over lunchtime.

When our nervous systems are becoming overloaded, our body can go into a fight or flight state which may make us want to lash out, cry, feel irritable, anxious, frustrated or angry. If you feel this happening, try the following.

- Do deep breathing exercises – this is the quickest and most effective way to help stop our nervous system from going into overload. Stand or sit upright. Place your hands on your stomach with finger tips touching and take a deep breath in. Your stomach should push your hand apart as you breathe in. Breathe out slowly (your stomach should come back in with your fingertips moving back together). Breathing apps may be useful to help learn to breathe slowly and deeply.
- Leave the situation you are in. Time out in a quiet space will allow your nervous system to settle.
- When you are feeling better, make sure that you follow this up with a movement activity such as walking up and down the stairs a few times or doing some push ups.