

Growth and Development from One to Three

Section 10–1

Sensory Dysfunction

In most children, the senses gather information about the world, and then the brain organizes and interprets that information to create a picture of the world that is meaningful to the child. Normally, this happens automatically. In some children, however, there is a breakdown in this process, and they cannot interpret the information from their senses in a normal way. This is called *sensory integration dysfunction*, or simply *sensory dysfunction*.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of sensory dysfunction vary from child to child. In some children, the symptoms are severe and cause learning and behavioral problems. In others, the symptoms are mild and may be interpreted merely as temperament traits. Some common signs of sensory dysfunction include:

- **Having too much or too little sensitivity to specific forms of stimulation.** These may include touch, movement, sights, sounds, or smells. For example, some children with sensory dysfunction are bothered by tags in their clothing or certain fabrics touching their skin. Others may be extremely picky eaters, sometimes even refusing to eat anything but one or two particular foods. Some children get sick when they smell certain odors, while others may try to smell everything around them, including other people.
- **Being easily distracted and impulsive.** Children with sensory dysfunction may be unable to screen out background noise or other sensory input that most people would simply ignore. This makes it difficult for them to stay focused on a task. Children with this problem may be diagnosed as having ADD (attention deficit disorder). They may be extremely active or inactive.
- **Seeking excessive forms of stimulation.** Many children with sensory dysfunction seem to be calmed by spinning, swinging, or jumping and want to do these activities over and over again.
- **Delays in the development of language, motor, and other skills.** When the disorder affects motor skills, children may seem clumsy or constantly run into objects. They may fall easily and may not catch themselves when they fall.

CAUSES

Sensory dysfunction can often be found in children who were born prematurely. Many children diagnosed with autism or cerebral palsy may also have some form of sensory dysfunction. Brain injuries are another cause of such problems. Studies have shown that up to 70 percent of children who are labeled as learning disabled may have some form of sensory dysfunction.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

If parents suspect that their child suffers from sensory dysfunction, they should have a qualified occupational or physical therapist evaluate the child. If the therapist determines that treatment is needed, an individualized program of activities can be developed to help the child learn to respond appropriately to sensory input. The kinds of activities will vary depending on the sensory problems that the child demonstrates.

Parents, especially parents of premature babies, need to be aware of sensory integration and provide environments for their children that are rich in sensory input, but not overly stimulating. Both over-stimulation and under-stimulation may cause sensory integration problems.

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Taking Action

Sensory dysfunction takes different forms in individual children. Some children are overly sensitive to touch, while others may overreact to sounds, light, or food. Being overly sensitive to particular types of stimulation is sometimes referred to as “defensiveness.”

Use Internet resources to learn more about each of the types of sensory dysfunction listed in the chart. Based on your findings, briefly describe the symptoms of each in the space provided.

Type of Dysfunction	Symptoms
Auditory Defensiveness	
Oral Defensiveness	
Tactile Defensiveness	
Visual Defensiveness	

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Feeding Toddlers

Toddlers are at an age when they are learning that they can do things for themselves. One of the first things they want to do is feed themselves. Even though it can be messy, it is important to encourage and help toddlers to learn this new skill.

The way toddlers eat changes a great deal between the ages of one and two. Because toddlers grow more slowly after their first birthday, they begin to eat less. They are cautious about eating new foods. Sometimes a toddler will want to eat the same food every day. Most toddlers prefer mild foods and foods that are kept separate from each other, rather than foods that are spicy or mixed together.

TIPS FOR FEEDING TODDLERS

The transition from being fed to self-feeding is an important one. Here are some tips:

- **Offer the same new food several times.** It can take several tries before a food becomes familiar and a child is willing to eat it.
- **Provide small amounts of food.** The recommended serving is about one tablespoon per year of age. If a toddler is still hungry, he or she can always ask for more.
- **Take cues from the child.** Toddlers will let you know when they are hungry or full. If a toddler seems to be finished with a meal, do not force the child to eat more.
- **Prepare finger foods.** Include foods that are easy to pick up. (See the chart.) Although toddlers want to use utensils, most do not have the fine motor skills they need to use them effectively. Let them use their fingers to pick up or scoop up the food.
- **Choose plates and utensils with the child in mind.** Unbreakable plates with slightly raised sides are good choices. The raised sides make it less likely that food will fall off the plate. Dishes and utensils that are child-size are easier for toddlers to use.
- **Do not let the mess stop you.** Learning to eat can be a messy job! If necessary, put a bib or towel around the toddler's neck and cover the floor with newspaper or a shower curtain liner. Make sure you are not wearing your best clothes either.
- **Keep the atmosphere pleasant.** Children will develop healthier eating habits in a pleasant environment. If mealtimes become too stressful, try a different approach.
- **Have regular meal times.** Keeping to routines, as much as possible, helps toddlers know what to expect.
- **Be a good role model.** Toddlers imitate adults, so it is important to set a good example. Chew with your mouth closed, and try new foods. Toddlers need to see adults eating and enjoying a variety of nutritious foods.
- **Avoid foods that are difficult to digest.** Some foods can cause stomachaches and other digestive problems. Examples include bacon, baked beans, chocolate, corn, cucumbers, leafy vegetables, and raw onions.
- **Avoid foods that can cause choking.** Some foods are known to be dangerous for toddlers because they can cause choking and even death by cutting off the toddlers' air supply.

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Good Finger Foods for Toddlers		
<p>Fruits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apricots (chunked) Apple slices (peeled) Banana pieces Grapefruit sections (seeded) Melon pieces Orange sections (seedless) Peach wedges (peeled) Pear wedges (peeled) Pineapple cubes Raisins Strawberries 	<p>Vegetables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asparagus spears Beets (cooked) Green beans (cooked) Peas Potato pieces (cooked) Tomato pieces (skin removed) 	<p>Protein Foods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheese cubes Chicken pieces Egg pieces (hard cooked) Ham chunks Tuna (canned) <p>Grain Products:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banana bread (no nuts) Crackers Dry unsweetened cereal Macaroni (cooked) Muffins Toast

Foods That Are Choking Hazards for Toddlers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bread sticks Hard candy Raw carrots Celery Fresh fruit with peels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hot dogs Nuts and seeds Olives Potato chips and corn chips Popcorn

Taking Action

Imagine that you are employed at a child care facility. You are put in charge of the selection, purchase, and serving of a morning and an afternoon snack for 14 toddlers for a period of one week. Assume that you need to prepare one-half cup of food for each child's snack. Make a chart, listing all of the foods you wish to serve, how much food you will need to purchase, and the approximate cost.