

HOW TO USE THE SENSORY FOOD JOURNAL

Take a look at the sensory components that could affect your child’s appetite and food preferences. The sensory aspects of food and mealtimes will help you figure out how to introduce new foods, and which ones to choose first. Put a “+” if the sensation stimulates your child (makes them more “hyper”). Put a “-” if it calms your child. You may not see the immediate results of calming or stimulation, but your child experiences it and chooses these sensory experiences as a way of regulating his or her nervous system.

Movement before a meal. Children with “vestibular processing” problems usually seek out constant movement or avoid movements that challenge their balance. The “vestibular apparatus” in our inner ears sends information to all parts of our brains and bodies, so processing problems affect us in many different ways. Many children and adults with “vestibular processing” problems also have difficulties with balance and may even experience the nausea of “motion sickness” much of the time – a sure-fire reason to avoid eating.

Observe your child’s activity before a meal.

Sensory Components	Stimulating	Calming
Vestibular (Movement & balance activities – before a meal)	Rapid movements – swinging, jumping, spinning, running	Slow movements – rocking, climbing, rolling
Visuals – appearance and environment	bright colors, small shapes, bright, flickering lights or rapid movements, for instance, a video screen	Monochromatic colors (usually white, yellow or beige), muted colors or pastels, large shapes, few details, slow movements, low and steady lighting
Smells – of food and in the environment	Minty, citrusy like lemons, spicy like cinnamon, chemical like cleaning products, acrid like burnt food.	Fragrant like flowers, creamy like vanilla, soothing like cloves, herbal like basil or bergamot (the flavor in Earl Gray tea), coffee scent calms and clears smells.
Textures and temperature	Crunchy, hard, thick, gooey, hot, cold.	Gummy, soft, thin, silky, cool or lukewarm.
Tastes	Sour, bitter, spicy. We learn to like these flavors.	Sweet, salty, pungent. Our comfort foods.
Sounds – of chewing and in the environment.	Crunching, slurping, sucking, metal utensils on ceramic dishes, fast-erratic music (rock, rap, hip- hop, heavy metal), loud conversation or shouting.	Silent foods and utensils, slow and rhythmic music (classical, folk, country, rhythm and blues), soft conversation or no talking at all.