**Eating**

No skill creates more anxiety in a parent that eating or lack of eating. Children

who have difficulty with this skill may have a heightened sensitivity to touch,

smell or taste. Children who are hypo-sensitive to sensory input may have little

awareness of their mouth and how to move their tongue and jaw. They may

have a poorly organised suck, swallow, and breath synchrony. Some children

have such a need for movement that they may not sit still long enough to eat a

meal. Their mealtimes may consist of a mouthful every “lap” around the

house. Other children may be at the other extreme. They use the mouth to

discover their world. Edible and non-edible items are mouthed, chewed and

sometimes swallowed. Developmentally, the mouth is the first area of the body

that can interpret sensory feedback accurately. As the hands develop in their

ability to accurately Interpret sensory input, they take over as the primary

“investigators” of the environment.

**Sensory Strategies**

• Be aware of textures, and temperature of food.

• Encourage the child to “clean” out his mouth with water between mouthfuls

of food.

• If your child is orally sensitive implement an oral desensitisation program

(ask your therapist about this).

• Apply pressure through the teeth, gums, cheeks and lips to prepare for

food.

* Allow your child to feel a variety of food types and textures with their hands prior to placing food in their mouth.

• Prepare for eating with movement (eg sitting on a bouncing ball, parent’s

lap, rocker board, Move ‘n Sit cushion/gel cushion).

• Use a small make-up mirror at the table to help with accuracy in placing

the food in the mouth and clean-up after each bite (the visual system can

compensate for decreased feedback through the tactile system).

* If your child is a messy eater, provide pressure touch around the lips and mouth

prior to eating and encourage oral motor activity (eg whistling, blowing

bubbles) to promote better sensory feedback and build muscle tone for

better mouth closure.

• If your child has difficulty using utensils, try weighted handles, which give

more sensory feedback and therefore make movements more accurate.

• Try a weighted cup, or a cup with a lid and a straw, if your child often spills

the drink.

• Use movement breaks for the active child.

• Try a weighted vest or weighted lap cushion to provide the extra input

necessary to sit still.

• Set up a small “café” table at school or day-care or arrange seating at the

end of the table, to minimise touch by others.

• Minimise overwhelming auditory and visual input.

**Other Strategies**

• Work within your child’s tolerance.

• Investigate food allergies, as well as fatigue and appetite.

• Begin with your child’s favourite foods and then increase choices.

• Encourage your child to request the food that he wants (or “seconds”)

independently.

• Pre-cut food to encourage independence.

• Modify utensils to compensate for fine motor and bilateral difficulties.

• Modify seating to compensate for developing balance and to promote an

upright seating position.

**Ideas for Self Help Skills – for children with Sensory Issues**

Adapted from ‘Building Bridges through Sensory Integration’ by Ellen Youch,

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