



## SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER

Sensory processing disorder is when our brains have difficulties receiving and responding to sensory information from our senses. This can cause a child to have difficulty with their daily activities.

Sensory processing disorder can lead to behavioral issues and can affect a child's development. The question that parents often ask me is whether their child will outgrow their sensory issues or if these issues will be lifelong.

It is possible for a child to outgrow some of their sensory issues, but it is not always the case. Every child is different, and their sensory issues may be more severe or mild than others.

Each person who struggles with sensory processing disorder can be either hypersensitive or hyposensitive to sensory input. This is known as a sensory seeker or a sensory avoider. You can be both a seeker and an avoider.

Some children may have mild sensory processing disorder symptoms that they are able to overcome with time, while others may have more severe sensory issues that require ongoing therapy and support. It is essential to recognize that sensory processing disorder is not something that a child can simply outgrow; however, with proper support and therapy, they can learn to manage their sensory differences.

A reason why some children may appear to outgrow some sensory processing disorder symptoms is that their brains are still developing.

Sensory processing disorders are often linked to a delay in the development of the central nervous system. As a child grows and their brain continues to develop, they may become better at processing sensory input. This can result in a decrease in their sensitivities.

If a child is constantly exposed to their sensory triggers, it can make their sensory issues more pronounced. However, if they are in an environment where these triggers are minimized, it can help them learn to cope and decrease their sensitivities.

Early intervention is crucial in helping a child with sensory processing differences. The earlier a child is diagnosed and receives therapy, the better their chances are of being able to cope with their sensory issues or finding better ways to manage them.



Occupational therapy focuses on sensory integration, helping children learn to process sensory input and develop coping strategies. With consistent therapy and support, children can learn to manage their sensory issues.

It is important to understand that not all children will outgrow their sensory processing disorder. Some children will continue to experience sensory processing disorder symptoms throughout their lives as teens and as adults, too. This is why it is important for parents to understand their child's sensory needs and provide them with the necessary support and accommodations to help them.

## Sensory Processing Disorder

(SPD) is a condition where the brain has difficulty receiving and responding appropriately to information that comes in through the senses. This can affect how individuals perceive and respond to sights, sounds, textures, tastes, smells, and movement. While not yet recognized as an official medical diagnosis in diagnostic manuals like the DSM-5, SPD is widely acknowledged by healthcare professionals, especially occupational therapists, due to its impact on daily life.

## Key Facts about SPD

### Who It Affects:

- Most often identified in children but can affect adults too.
- Common in individuals with autism, ADHD, and other neurodevelopmental conditions.
- Can occur without any other diagnosis.

Estimated to affect 1–3 out of every 20 people.

## Types of Sensory Processing Disorder

1. Sensory Over-Responsivity (SOR):
  - Overreacts to sensory input (e.g., bothered by tags, bright lights, loud sounds).
2. Sensory Under-Responsivity (SUR):
  - Doesn't respond to stimuli others notice (e.g., doesn't notice name being called).
3. Sensory Craving (SC):



- Constantly seeks intense sensory input (e.g., spinning, jumping, touching everything).
- 4. Sensory Discrimination Disorder:
  - Difficulty interpreting differences between similar sensory input (e.g., can't tell where a sound came from).
- 5. Postural Disorder:
  - Poor body awareness and balance; trouble with sitting still or coordinating movements.
- 6. Dyspraxia (Motor Planning Issues):
  - Trouble planning and executing physical movements (e.g., difficulty learning to ride a bike).

## Symptoms of SPD

Symptoms vary by type but may include:

- Clumsiness or frequent bumping into things
- Sensitivity to textures, fabrics, or foods
- Difficulty with fine motor tasks (e.g., writing, buttoning)
- Poor coordination or motor planning
- Difficulty with loud environments or bright lights
- Excessive movement or difficulty staying still
- Intruding on others' personal space

## Causes and Risk Factors

Cause:

- Exact causes are unknown but likely involve both genetic and environmental factors.

Risk Factors Include:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- ADHD
- Learning disorders
- Mood disorders (e.g., DMDD, OCD)
- No known coexisting condition (in some cases)

## Diagnosis



Since SPD is not formally recognized as a medical diagnosis:

- Diagnosis typically involves a pediatrician referral to an occupational therapist.
- Evaluation includes:
  - Observation of sensory responses
  - Developmental history
  - Parent/caregiver interviews
  - Sensory profile assessments

Treatment and Management

Therapy helps improve function and comfort in daily life.

1. Occupational Therapy (OT):

- Tailored programs to improve:
  - Sensory regulation
  - Motor skills
  - Daily living activities
  - Social interaction

2. Sensory Integration Therapy:

- Engages the individual in fun, structured sensory activities.
- Helps the brain adapt and respond more effectively to sensory input.

3. Home and School Sensory Supports:

- Examples:
  - Noise-canceling headphones
  - Fidget tools
  - Movement breaks (e.g., swings, jumping jacks)
- OT may create a “sensory diet” — daily activities designed to meet sensory needs.

4. Motor Skill Development:



- Gross motor (e.g., balance, coordination)
- Fine motor (e.g., writing, cutting)

CALL US if:

- You notice unusual sensory behaviors in your child (or yourself).
- These behaviors affect learning, relationships, or self-care.
- You want guidance on strategies to help manage sensory sensitivities.

We have occupational therapists who specialize in sensory integration.

Occupational therapy techniques and approaches

Occupational therapy for SPD includes sensory integration therapy. This intervention helps individuals process, organize, and respond to sensory information. It includes purposeful activities that give controlled sensory input.

Adaptive equipment and environmental modifications are also part of OT for SPD. Weights, vests, and pressure garments provide proprioceptive input. Quiet spaces and visual supports reduce sensory overload.

Play-based interventions are used too. Games and art activities stimulate different senses while targeting specific areas of difficulty.

OT techniques and approaches are tailored to each individual's unique profile and needs. Therapists collaborate with clients and families to develop personalized treatment plans.

OT techniques support individuals with SPD by enhancing their sensory processing, improving attention and self-regulation, and promoting participation in daily life activities. Optimal outcomes are achieved with collaboration between OT, individuals, and families.

Individuals with Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) often struggle with sensory distractions, focus issues, and difficulties in self-regulation. Interventions like



sensory breaks, deep pressure activities, visual supports, and calming tools can help enhance attention abilities and improve self-regulation skills.

Social interactions can also be challenging due to issues with processing social cues and sensory overload. Social skills training that includes teaching empathy, perspective-taking, and appropriate responses can help facilitate better social interactions.

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often go together. Many people with ASD also have difficulty processing sensory information. This can make everyday life hard.

ASD affects social communication and behavior. SPD refers to the difficulty in processing sensations from the environment. Researchers believe these two conditions share a common neurological basis.

People with ASD may be too sensitive, not sensitive enough, or constantly seek sensations. This can involve touch, sound, and vision.

Occupational therapists work to diagnose and plan treatment for individuals with SPD and ASD. They assess and collaborate with other professionals to create interventions.

ADHD and developmental delays share some symptoms with SPD, but it's like comparing two different cars.

Overlapping symptoms with ADHD and developmental delays

Both ADHD and SPD can bring about hyperactivity and impulsivity, such as excess movement and difficulty sitting calmly.

Inattention is also a shared symptom; having trouble focusing, following instructions, and doing tasks that need sustained attention.

Sensitivities to sound, touch, or movement can be heightened or lowered in both conditions.



Poor motor coordination is another characteristic of these two conditions. Clumsiness, balance issues, and troubles with fine motor tasks may show up.

Emotional regulation is hard for those with ADHD and SPD, with frequent outbursts and meltdowns.

Socializing can be tricky due to impulsivity, sensory sensitivities, or lack of social skills.

It's significant to note that each person's experience with these conditions differs. One may show stronger symptoms of one disorder over the other. Thus, it's essential for healthcare professionals to do a comprehensive evaluation for correct diagnosis and suitable interventions.