

Summer Sensory Survival Kit



Along with all the lovely things that summer entails, there are some sensory challenges posed by the change in weather, daylight hours, breaks from school routines, eating outdoors, travelling and staying in holiday accommodation. We've packed this kit with practical tips and suggestions to help those experiencing sensory integration or sensory processing differences better manage the sensory challenges of summer.

Unique to You

We all have individual sensory needs and preferences. All the suggestions in this Kit should be tailored to you or your child's specific sensory needs, abilities and preferences.

What Do We Mean by Sensory Integration?

Sensory integration is the way our brains take in, process, and respond to sensory information from the environment and also from within our own bodies.

What are Sensory Differences?

Everyone's way of processing sensory information is different. But sometimes sensory processing differences can make it hard for a person to handle sensory information, understand it, and react appropriately. Sensory differences can affect how we spend our time and what we feel able to do on a day-to-day basis.

Contents

- 3 Pack Your Sensory Grab Bag
- 4 Sun Safety & Keeping Cool
- 6 Your Summer Wardrobe
- 7 Tips for Boosting or Calming Energy Levels
- 8 Surviving School Holidays
- 9 Travel Tips for a Smooth Journey
- 10 Summer Food & Outdoor Eating
- 10 Sensory Friendly Venues
- 11 Swimming Pools
- 12 At the Beach
- 13 Summer Sports & Leisure



Pack Your Sensory Grab Bag

Create a personalised sensory kit in a backpack that you can grab when heading out. The goal is to collate items that help you feel regulated (in a calm but alert state) and help you avoid feeling overwhelmed.

You should tailor your sensory grab bag to your unique sensory needs, but common items to include are:

- Noise-cancelling earplugs or headphones
- A drink bottle with a straw
- Favourite chewy or crunchy snacks
- Chewable toys, chewellery or chewing gum
- Weighted lap pads or toys
- Sunglasses and/or hat
- Fidget toys
- Visual toys, e.g., a liquid timer
- Cards with breathing exercise prompts
- Squeezable stress ball
- Scented item such as scented putty or lip balm
- A soft, seamless hoodie

Top Tip: Create a mini version of your sensory grab bag in a small zip-up case for when a larger bag isn't possible.



Sun Safety & Keeping Cool

Applying Sunscreen to Sensory Kids

The [NHS recommends](#) that children wear a minimum SPF 30 sunscreen lotion on areas not covered by clothing, such as the face, ears, feet, and backs of the hands. People with sensory integration or sensory processing difficulties can be tactile defensive – highly sensitive to touch – and, to these children and adults, sunscreen can feel unbearably greasy and heavy on their skin.

- Introduce the routine of applying sunscreen and explain the need for it in advance. You can create a social story or find one online, like [this one](#).
- Demonstrate applying sunscreen on yourself and ask your child to rub some sunscreen into your arm to check their tolerance to different brands.
- Before applying sunscreen, invite your child to do a favourite sensory activity that helps them prepare for being touched, such as deep pressure activities, rolling, using weighted items, wearing a sensory body sock, games involving tight hugs, etc.
- Start by trialling sunscreens that you think are most likely to be tolerated, such as unscented, oil-free or Japanese-style sunscreens.
- Consider the application method that suits your child's sensory needs, such as spray, lotion, roll-on, or sunscreen stick.
- It may help to distract your child whilst applying the sunscreen: ask them to talk to you about one of their interests or to sing you a song.
- Try gently warming liquid sunscreens in the sun – applying them straight from the cupboard to warm skin can feel uncomfortably cold.
- Prepare your child for the fact that sunscreen needs to be reapplied after water play and every 2 hours. Use a timer or countdown to manage the transition.

Top Tip: *Stick to the routine so your child knows what to expect.*



Keeping Cool

People with interoception difficulties (problems interpreting signals coming from inside their bodies) can have trouble noticing when they are too hot or thirsty.

- Choose a cool location for summer fun that works for your child's sensory needs. For example, if you or your child struggles with sand, avoid the beach and go to a swimming pool instead. If busy, noisy places are upsetting, set up a picnic and paddling pool at home.
- Plan outdoor activities for early morning or late afternoon, when the sun is less intense.
- Wear clothing that provides sun protection, such as hats with wide brims, long-sleeved tops, rash guard shirts and long trousers or skirts. Look for items with an SPF or UPF rating.
- Find some comfortable sunglasses.
- Bring along shade-providing items like canopies, umbrellas, or parasols. Look for ones made from fabric with a minimum of an SPF or UPF 50+ rating.
- Provide plenty of cool drinks and snacks. Opt for favourite cold snacks that you can be confident will be accepted. You could make a game out of crunching ice chips or involve your child in making homemade ice lollies and frozen fruit.
- Encourage safe sensory water play with a paddling pool or sensory bin.
- Use cooling items like gel packs, cooling neck scarves, or battery-operated fans to help you or your child stay comfortable. Fill a hot water bottle with iced water and wrap it in a favourite snuggly or pillowcase.
- Remember to monitor your child's temperature and hydration levels, especially if they have difficulty sensing when they are too hot or thirsty. You could set an alarm on your phone to remind you to check in with yourself, too.

Top Tip: *Pop-up tents with sun protection ratings can be useful, but ensure they are well-ventilated as they can act as heat traps.*



Your Summer Wardrobe

Seasonal changes or visits to different climates can be a struggle for individuals with sensory sensitivities. Here are some suggestions for transitioning to a summer wardrobe.

- If shopping for your child, involve them in choosing the items and respect their views.
- If clothes are specifically for a holiday destination with a different climate, encourage your child to try wearing these clothes at home to ensure they are comfortable and to familiarise themselves with how they feel and how to put them on.
- Choose fabrics that feel good on your skin. Some people may find cotton or linen to be more comfortable than synthetic fabrics like polyester or nylon. Look for breathable fabrics that won't trap heat against your skin.
- If you find tight-fitting clothing uncomfortable, try looser styles like flowy dresses or shorts with a drawstring waist. If you don't like the feeling of bare skin, try wearing a lightweight long-sleeve shirt or leggings under your clothes.
- Consider layering. Layering can provide a sense of comfort and security for some people. Try wearing a lightweight jacket or cardigan over a tank top or dress, or a lightweight scarf around your neck.
- Remember that it's okay to prioritise your own comfort over fashion trends. Focus on finding what feels good to you and wear it with confidence.
- Look for retailers that offer seamless or tagless clothes or easy-fasten items, such as [The Sensory Smart Store](#).

Top Tip: Wash new items before wearing them; this will remove any unfamiliar scents and soften the fabric.



Tips for Boosting or Calming Energy Levels

Self-regulation is intertwined with how the body understands, manages and reacts to information from our senses – both about what is happening in our environment and what is happening within our own body.

Dramatic changes to daily/weekly routines can be very dysregulating for both children and adults. With some forethought, you can plan how you will support yourself or your child from becoming overwhelmed and how to get energised to participate in activities. If it is your child who is becoming overwhelmed, remember that co-regulation is the start of self-regulation: you need to model the emotional state that your child needs to shift to.

Calming Activities:

- Use a weighted lap pad or backpack.
- Do heavy work like push-ups, pushing against a wall, or carrying something heavy.
- Chew gum, chewy food, or chewable items.
- Drink a thick drink, like a smoothie, through a straw.
- Try short calming yoga sessions or breathing exercises.
- Try the [5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique](#).
- Use a swing if you find that kind of motion soothing.
- Create a calming sensory space at home (more info in the next section).
- Save helpful apps to your phone or device, such as calming visual displays, breathing exercises, or yoga sessions.
- Create a calming playlist of music.

Activities to Feel More Alert or Energised:

- Dance to your favourite music – save a playlist of your favourite upbeat tracks.
- Do upbeat exercises or follow short workout videos online.
- Get moving in an enjoyable way – riding a bike, bouncing on a trampoline, visiting a playground, or doing an obstacle course around the living room or garden.
- Eat crunchy food or drink a cold drink.
- Try stretching.

Top Tip: *Get outdoors! Depending on the activity you choose, e.g., walking or jogging, cycling or focusing on the natural environment, this can be calming or energising.*

If you are receiving therapy for sensory integration or processing difficulties, ask your SI Practitioner for individualised advice that fits your or your child's unique sensory needs.

Surviving School Holidays

Even if you have a trip away planned, there will still be plenty of days during the long summer school holidays when your children will be at home, and you may still need to complete chores or work.

Organise Your Day

- Make a schedule that works for both you and your child.
- Create a schedule board with pictures of calming and energising activities your child can choose from. It will be reassuring to your child to know what activity comes next.
- Include movement breaks in the day to provide sensory input and regulation.
- Remember to include snack times!
- Use a preferred style of timer (e.g., music or a visual one) to let your child know how long each activity is going to last.

Create a Sensory Space

- Create a quiet, calm space in your home where your child can go if they become overwhelmed or overstimulated. This could be a sensory room, a quiet corner, or simply a designated area where your child can relax and take a break from sensory input.
- Fill it with their favourite sensory items – see suggestions from the Sensory Grab Bag section above.

Ask for Help with Chores

- Helping with chores can be fun (really!), particularly chores that involve push or pull activities, as these provide regulating sensory input.
- Examples include carrying or sorting laundry, carrying items back to the owner's room, washing windows (wiping vertical surfaces is great practice and 'crossing the midline' – coordinating moving the arms across to the opposite side of the body), and sweeping the floors or yard.

Stick to a Bedtime Routine

- Consistency is key, so try to stick to your child's usual bedtime routine as much as possible, even when the school routine is disrupted.
- This may include having a set bedtime, engaging in calming activities like reading or sensory play before bed, and using sensory aids like weighted soft toys or white noise machines to help your child relax and fall asleep.
- By maintaining a consistent bedtime routine, you can help your child feel more secure and regulated, which can lead to better sleep and a smoother transition back to the school routine when the holidays end.

Top Tip: Reach out for support from friends, family, or professionals if you need it. Summer holidays can be challenging for any parent, and it's okay to ask for help when you need it.

Travel Tips for a Smooth Journey

Airports and railway stations can be particularly challenging with their bright lights, loud announcements, crowded spaces and smells from food vendors. Here are some tips to help make your journey smoother:

- **Prepare in advance:** Contact your travel provider and find out if they offer any assistance or accommodations for travellers with additional needs. Some airports and airlines have sensory rooms or offer early boarding. Plan to travel at quieter times where possible.
- **Consider the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard:** The [Sunflower Lanyard scheme](#) is a simple tool that you can use to voluntarily share that you have a disability or condition that may not be immediately apparent. This can help you receive extra assistance or more time in public spaces.
- **Use sensory stories or videos:** Before your trip, use sensory stories or videos to familiarise your child with the process of travelling to your destination. You can also show them pictures and videos of the place you are visiting and talk about the kind of sights, sounds, and smells they can expect to experience there.
- **Pack your own supplies:** If you or your child prefers particular toiletry or food items that won't be available at your destination, pack supplies with you if possible. Take your own face cloth, towel, and pillowcase if the textures/scent of these are important to your comfort.
- **Exercise before long journeys:** Whether that's adults going for a walk or run, or children playing in a playground.
- **Cover scratchy seats:** If the texture of seats on public transport bothers you, plan to wear longer clothing or use a scarf or blanket to cover the seat.
- **Wear layers to manage temperature:** The temperature on planes and trains can vary a lot. If you struggle with interoception (recognising and understanding signals from inside your body), you may not realise that your discomfort is due to being chilly or too warm.
- **Break up long car journeys:** If you are travelling by car, break up long journeys with frequent stops that offer the opportunity to get out of the car and move around.
- **Maintain bedtime routines:** Try to maintain your child's bedtime routines as much as possible, even when travelling.
- **Soothe ear pressure:** To soothe ear pressure during take-off and landing, suck on a lollipop or drink through a straw.
- **Pack crunchy snacks for sensory regulation:** Just make sure they are allowable through security.
- **Bring your own entertainment:** Pack your or your child's own preferred entertainment preloaded on a tablet with headphones or earbuds.

Top Tip: Heavy work activities provide calming and organising proprioceptive input. For example, get your child to push a luggage trolley or wheeled suitcase or carry a backpack to provide this kind of input.



Summer Food & Outdoor Eating

Summer brings the opportunity to picnic outdoors, or you may be more likely to eat at cafes and restaurants on days away. Some people find trying unfamiliar food, or familiar foods that are prepared or served in slightly different ways, tricky to eat. Here are a few suggestions:

Pack familiar snacks: If you are going on a trip, pack some of your child's favourite snacks that they are used to eating at home. This will give them a sense of familiarity and comfort when it comes to food.

Be prepared to cook: If you are staying in self-catered accommodation, consider bringing some ingredients and perhaps a favourite bowl or cutlery with you (where travel rules allow this). This will enable you to prepare meals that your child is familiar with and comfortable eating.

Encourage trying new foods gradually: You can encourage your child to try new foods by introducing them gradually. Start with a small amount and allow them to take their time to explore the texture and taste. Don't force them to eat anything they are not comfortable with.

Explain what to expect: When trying new foods or drinks, explain to your child what to expect in terms of taste, texture, and smell. This can help them feel more prepared and less anxious about trying something new.

Offer alternatives: If your child is not comfortable with a certain food or drink, offer them an alternative that they are comfortable with. For example, if they don't like fizzy drinks, offer them a non-carbonated alternative.

Top Tip: *Involve your child in choosing, preparing and packing the food for a picnic.*



Sensory Friendly Venues

A sensory-friendly venue is a location that has been designed or adapted to minimise sensory input and create a more comfortable and accessible environment for individuals with sensory processing difficulties. This could include lower lighting, quieter sounds, and reduced visual clutter, as well as accommodations such as designated quiet spaces, access to sensory tools, and trained staff familiar with sensory issues. The goal of a sensory-friendly venue is to create a welcoming and inclusive space for individuals who might otherwise find certain environments overwhelming or overstimulating.

There isn't a single directory of sensory-friendly accommodation, venues and days out, but you can search for 'autism-friendly' or 'sensory-friendly' hotels, venues and activities near you. Theatres and cinemas often use the term 'relaxed performances' to describe showings with toned-down voice and movement, changes to lighting and relaxed rules about the audience making noise.

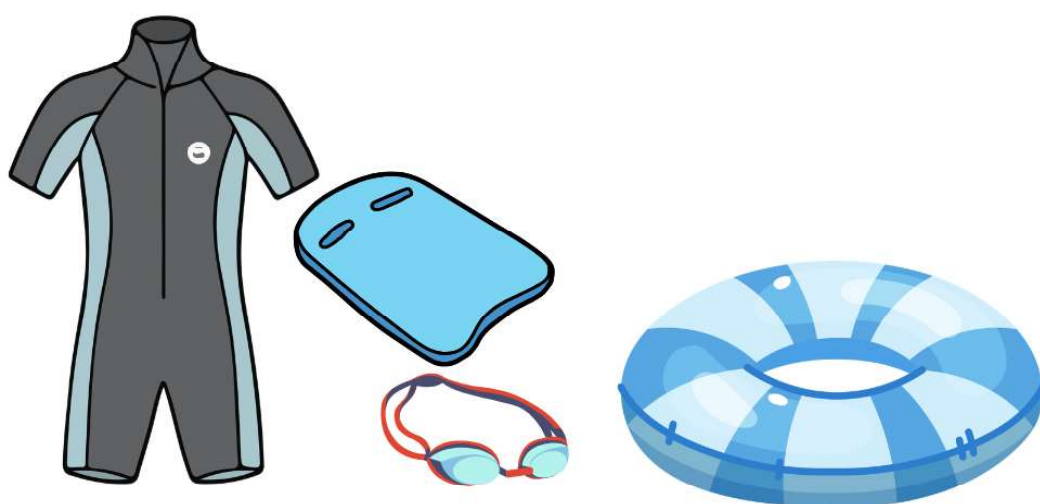
Top Tip: *Phone ahead to any venue you plan to visit to see what options they offer, for example, making quiet or sensory rooms available, quieter hours, sensory bags, etc.*

Swimming Pools

Water can be calming, and the pressure of deeper water in a pool is great for proprioceptive input, but visiting a pool when you have sensory integration differences has some challenges. Here are some tips for a more enjoyable experience:

- Try finding out about quieter times and accessible spaces in the car park, or ask about quieter swim sessions.
- Arrive swim-ready if possible with a comforting robe or onesie over the top to avoid the noise and bright lights of changing rooms.
- You can bring flip-flops for use in the changing rooms and around the pool, or wear wetsuit boots or water shoes that haven't been worn outside.
- If you don't like how floats or pool noodles feel in the water, search for a stockist of special covers for floats and noodles.
- Different swim aids can affect balance and body position in the water, with some being more helpful than others depending on balance and proprioceptive needs.
- Goggles can be helpful if you don't like water in your face and eyes or get anxious about that happening. Look for ones that meet your sensory preferences, such as Frogglez.
- Fins/flippers can be used in lessons and lane swims for extra proprioceptive feedback.
- Use accessories like swim hats or earplugs to reduce noise and water in the ears.
- Some people find transitioning from wet to dry uncomfortable: it's fine to wrap up warm in a robe and travel home to change.

Top Tip: Neoprene is a great choice for the pool if you're sensitive to cold or enjoy the squeeze of compression-wear.



At the Beach

If you're planning to enjoy the sand, sea and sun at the beach this summer, try these tips:

Prepare ahead of time: Talk to your child about what to expect at the beach. Show them pictures or videos of the beach so they can get familiar with the environment. Discuss what activities they might want to do and what they will need to bring.

Test out the feeling of sand: If this is the first time you are taking your sensory child to the beach, let them play with the texture of sand at home first. Some people really don't like the texture of sand on their skin. Ensure you have a towel or blanket to sit on.

Choose the right time of day: For people who are sensitive to the sun and heat, it's best to plan beach trips early in the morning or late in the afternoon when the sun is not as strong.

Bring appropriate gear: Make sure you and your child have a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, and appropriate clothing. Some people may prefer to wear long sleeves and pants or a wetsuit or rash guard to protect against sunburn.

Find a quiet spot: Look for a quieter spot on the beach away from crowds and noise. Bring a beach tent or umbrella to provide some shade and a quiet space for you or your child to relax.

Bring sensory tools, drinks and snacks: Remember your or your child's sensory grab bag!

Be prepared for the water: If your child is sensitive to water, bring a small bucket or container for them to play with water at their own pace.

Plan for breaks: Take frequent breaks in a quiet area away from the sun and noise to allow you or your child to rest and recharge.

Top Tip: *Be flexible. If you or your child are feeling overwhelmed or overstimulated, it's okay to cut the beach trip short and leave it to another day.*

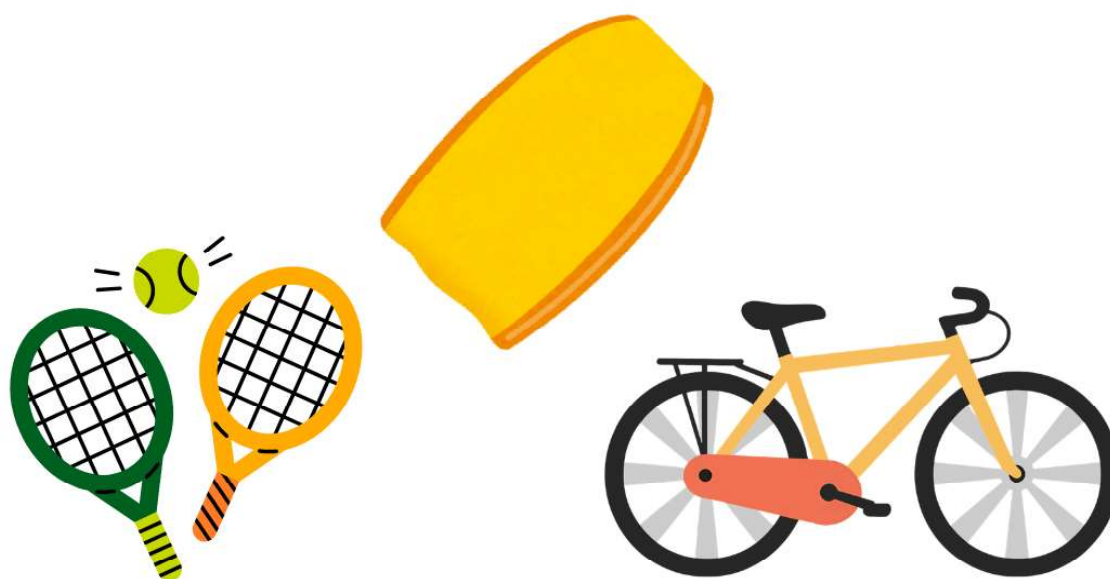


Summer Sports & Leisure

People with praxis difficulties find planning how to physically perform an action tricky. It's like only knowing step 3 in the instructions and not being able to work out steps 1 and 2. People with vestibular problems can experience dizziness, vertigo, poor coordination, and difficulty with balance. Many summer sports and leisure activities require good motor planning skills and balance, but it doesn't mean you have to sit out, particularly as participating in sports and leisure activities may help to improve your coordination.

If you or your child wants to participate in a leisure activity, whether that's tennis or bodyboarding lessons, it will be helpful to call ahead to talk with the instructor first. Ask them to break down the process of the activity into the smallest possible steps. And also to explain what it will feel like to wear or use any required equipment. You could familiarise yourself or your child by watching videos or talking to friends who practise the sport. Being prepared will help you or your child enjoy the experience.

Top Tip: *Break down the activity into smaller parts and practice skills in an unpressurised environment before joining in with a group.*



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Established in 1994, Sensory Integration Education is a not-for-profit international training provider dedicated to one thing: helping professionals and families understand sensory processing and support people with sensory processing and integration differences.

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