

Sensory Questionnaire

Sense of Smell/Taste

Greater Glasgow and Clyde



This series of Sensory Questionnaires are designed to enable you to check your child's progress at particular stages of development.

YOUR SENSES OF SMELL AND TASTE

Our senses of smell and taste are closely linked, as they follow the same neural pathway through the brain. Some people seem not to have a sense of smell, which can be useful in some circumstances (think teenagers bedrooms or school changing rooms!) Other people are so sensitive to certain tastes and smells that they can retch when they walk into a kitchen or classroom.

Whilst this is not an issue for most people, it can be for others. It is almost impossible to change how people process smell or taste but you can try different strategies to help reduce the impact.

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Question 1 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

Question 1

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Did your child have problems with weaning i.e. moving from liquids to solids?

Young children can struggle with the process of moving from liquids to solids for a variety of reasons. Children who have been intubated as babies can struggle particularly. As a parent it is hard to deal with issues around feeding as it is quite an emotional aspect of parenting; we show our love by nurturing our children, and one of the main ways we nurture is through feeding.



Strategies and Suggestions

Young children can experience issues with the transition from liquids to solids for various reasons. Some children just enjoy milk and don't feel a need for anything else (after all it is less effort to swallow liquid than have to chew solids), others may have had a bad experience with choking and are wary of anything lumpy, and others simply don't like the texture, taste or temperature of different foods.

There are some excellent ideas on the child development timeline for dealing with fussy toddlers; look under 18 month's nutrition. Also there is an information sheet on [Fussy Eaters](#) available in the resource section. You may want to consider trying the following activity:

- Children with tactile defensiveness may not be able to tolerate more than one texture in their food; so ensure you puree food to ensure a consistency of texture throughout.





Question 2 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

Question 2

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Does your child gag easily with certain food textures or having utensils in mouth?

Does your child gag when eating certain food? If your child gags at the smell of some foods, this is not about food tastes and you should answer 'no' to this question and 'yes' to the next question.



Strategies and Suggestions

If your child gags easily at certain textures this is actually more likely to be about touch rather than taste. You have touch receptors inside your mouth and if your child is sensitive to touch anyway this can impact on their ability to eat certain consistencies. It can be hard to eat a yoghurt or a banana if your body is telling your brain 'this is slimy', or chew on crunchy textures if your body thinks 'this is really hard'.

- If anxiety levels are high your child may not eat well so ensure a calm, comfortable environment during mealtimes.
- Encourage your child to smell foods during activities e.g. at snack time, highlight the smell of the orange juice and another child's special biscuits. Make it a positive thing "mmm this biscuit smells sweet!"
- Use food in play: spread fruity yoghurt on a tray and draw 'pictures' in it, play with cooked and cooled spaghetti, hide toys in a bowl of Rice Krispies (don't add milk!!) and encourage your child to find them.

If your child prefers softer food then let the main part of their meal consist of this but introduce one firmer textured item at the side of their plate. Or if they only like 'dry' food have a small bowl at the side of the plate with some sauce covered food in it. Encourage them to take it to their mouth but don't get angry if they can't eat it. Try grading the experience but don't rush things you may have to spend a week or two at each stage of the process:

1. Initially it's enough that they tolerate the food on their plate.
2. Once your child can cope with the food being nearby get them to put a small piece onto their fork or spoon and sniff it. Do this for a few days.
3. Next ask them to touch the food to their lips. Don't force the issue but gently persevere.





Question 2 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

4. When they are comfortable with this ask them to touch the food with the tip of their tongue. Again don't force the issue but give them lots of praise if they manage.
5. Finally get them to take a tiny bite and give them lots of praise for trying.

If your child doesn't tolerate the sensation of a spoon or fork in their mouth try using plastic cutlery instead. It is possible to buy plastic coated metal cutlery but plastic picnic cutlery can be just as effective and is much cheaper.





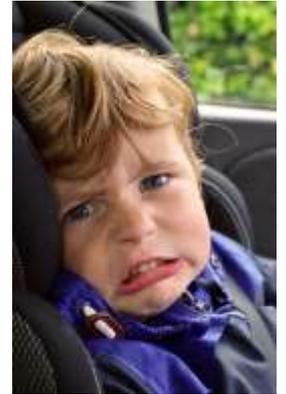
Question 3 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

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Does your child show distress at smells that other people may not notice?

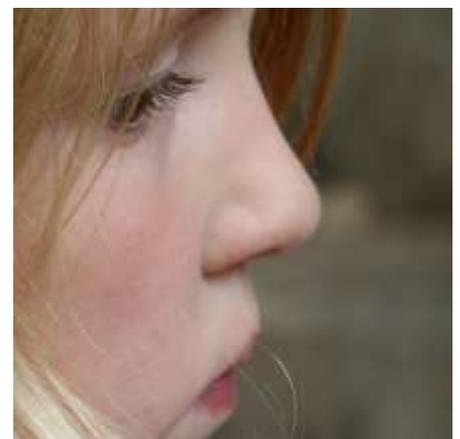
Often children who are sensitive to smell can react quite strongly to scents or aromas that barely register with others. If your child is sensitive to smell then they may struggle to cope with being in an enclosed space with someone who is wearing strong perfume, or sitting close to someone who smells of whatever food they have just eaten.



Strategies and Suggestions

Often children who are sensitive to smell can react quite strongly to scents or aromas that barely register with others. If your child is sensitive to smell then they may struggle to cope with being in an enclosed space with someone who is wearing strong perfume, or sitting close to someone who smells of whatever food they have just eaten.

- Avoid preparing strong smelling foods whilst your child is in the house. Try to keep the kitchen door closed and a window open when you are cooking.
- If child has aversion to certain smells it may be helpful for them to carry around a pleasant smell (e.g. a few drops of essential oil) in a flannel or on a tissue to use when being exposed to smell they dislike.
- Introduce smells in a fun and relaxed environment, possibly at the weekend or at bath-time. Try making 'smelly' play dough, massage with smelly lotions, or play with 'scratch and sniff' stickers. Work at your child's pace and allow them to leave if they find it too overpowering.
- Try to limit exposure to smells, help your child to be aware of strategies to help them avoid smells they find unpleasant.
- Ask adults who work with your child in nursery to refrain from using strong perfume, hand cream etc. in nursery setting.





Question 4 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

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Is your child a picky eater, especially regarding food textures e.g. doesn't like lumps in food?

All children can be fussy eaters but if your child is still refusing to try more textured food by the time they have reached primary school it does limit their opportunities to participate in school meals, birthday parties etc. Answer 'yes' to this question for some strategies and advice to try and expand the range of textures they will cope with.



Strategies and Suggestions

Mealtimes can be emotionally charged events; you have spent ages making food, you may have several people to cook for and your little angel refuses point blank to eat what you have produced. Cue the daily battle of wills!

You probably have well-meaning relatives giving you the benefit of their experience (which can be worth listening to sometimes) as well as others telling you that you are being too weak or inconsistent (which just makes you feel worse). Take heart, don't be discouraged, and most importantly don't give up.

- Look on the developmental timeline (at the 18 months stage) for advice on fussy eaters, as well as a downloadable booklet full of strategies and ideas that you can save and print off.
- Introduce new foods by expanding one sensory characteristic at a time, e.g. if your child eats yoghurt introduce Rice Krispies or finely chopped fruit into the yoghurt to produce texture.
- Use a plate with compartments for food, or try to space foods to allow for consistency.



There are no quick fix answers but perseverance will pay off.





Question 6 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

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Does your child avoid certain tastes that are typically part of a child's diet?

Most children start to develop strong preferences and dislikes when it comes to food, choosing not to eat vegetables or only liking certain flavours of crisps. These are perfectly normal and do not impact on your child's ability to consume a reasonable varied diet, however some children are so fussy and so restricted in the choices that they make that they are unable to consume what would normally be considered 'child friendly' food e.g. they can't eat pizza because they don't like the texture of the melted cheese or the tomato sauce.



Strategies and Suggestions

Having a child who is a fussy eater can be extremely difficult to cope with; as parents we nurture our children by feeding them, and when they reject what we give them it can be easy to take it personally. Try not to make meal times a battle ground, and if your child is growing and has energy then they are probably getting enough nutrition from their diet, no matter how restricted it appears.

If you are worried about whether your child is getting enough nutrition from their diet speak to your GP regarding the use of vitamin supplements.

Try to work out if your child is fussy because of a taste sensitivity, a touch sensitivity or a visual sensitivity.



- If it is due to taste your child will probably only like bland, sweet or spicy food.
- If it is due to a touch sensitivity they will only be able to stick to certain textures or temperatures e.g. smooth or crunchy foods, hot or cold foods. Try massaging around your child's mouth with a facecloth whenever you wipe their face, or using an electric toothbrush, not just to clean their teeth, but also to massage round their mouth and gums. This should increase their tolerance to different touch sensations.

If it is due to a visual sensitivity your child will only eat food that is a certain colour. Try changing the colour of the plate you serve the food on, adding a few drops of food colouring to food you know they like and will eat, or even getting your child to wear sun glasses whilst they are eating.





Question 6 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

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Does your child like to taste, chew or lick non-food items e.g. paint, glue etc?

Younger children explore their environment using their mouths, and babies usually take everything to their mouths to see how it feels as well as how it tastes. By the time a child starts school however they have normally outgrown this behaviour. Often children suck their thumbs, chew on pencils, or even their collars or cuffs, as a calming strategy; this tends to be done sub-consciously in that your child is doing it without thinking or being aware they are doing so. We are not referring to this behaviour here. This question purely relates to your child deliberately eating potentially damaging or dangerous items such as glue, earth, stones, wood etc.



Strategies and Suggestions

Children may well sniff items or rub them round their mouths, but not actually eat them. Whilst unusual this is not dangerous and is usually a stage that a child will outgrow.

Children who regularly eat non-food items are described as having pica. There can be different reasons why children do this.

Sometimes children can eat non-food items because they are deficient in certain minerals such as iron and zinc. It is worth checking with your GP to see if your child does require mineral supplements.

Some children eat non-food items because they enjoy the sensation of certain textures. Whilst you and I might struggle to understand why anybody can like the feeling of grains of sand or earth in our mouths, some children enjoy the intensity of the sensation.



It is important to let others know what items your child tends to put to their mouths in order that adults working with your child can keep the preferred items out of reach.

Using a social story to reinforce the importance of NOT eating non-food items, can help explain to a child why not to do this. Close monitoring and consistent reinforcement can help break the pattern of behaviour.





Question 7 - Smell/Taste (2 - 5 Years)

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Does your child like to smell non-food items?

This is normally not an issue unless your child oversteps social boundaries and perhaps spends time sniffing people or items in public places, in which case it is important to find strategies to prevent them accidentally offending others. Sniffing an adult can seem cute when a child is 3, but is much less socially acceptable when they are 13. If your child is a 'sniffer' of people or things please respond 'yes' to this question.



Strategies and Suggestions

Children do explore their world using all their senses so if they explore things by smelling them, it isn't really something you need to concern yourself with at this stage unless their behaviour appears extreme.

Use social stories to explain to your child what your rules are around acceptable smelling of others e.g. that sniffing is ok in the house when it's mum and dad but not ok in public or with other people.

Find a 'smell' your child likes and keep a tissue in their pocket when you are out and about. Guide them to sniff the tissue rather than the person if you see them about to smell someone.

