

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 (12 - 18 Years)

Question 1

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Do you gag when eating certain food textures or when you put a fork or spoon into your mouth?

Do you gag when eating certain foods? If you gag at the SMELL of some foods, then that is not about how food tastes so you should answer 'no' to this question and 'yes' to the next question.



Strategies and Suggestions

If you gag 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 you are sensitive to touch anyway this can impact on your 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 like crunching glass'.

- Try helping with food preparation. Being involved in the making of snacks and meals lets you 'feel' and 'smell' the ingredients in a less threatening environment than simply having the food put down to you.
- If you don't like the feel of cold metal utensils in your hands try plastic cutlery or wooden utensils during snack preparation.
- If you can't tolerate the sensation of a metal spoon or fork in your 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 tends to be much cheaper.
- If you are sensitive to noise it can be difficult to eat if all you can hear is the chewing and crunching of others. Try using ear defenders or headphones.
- Deep pressure can make other sensory systems less sensitive so you may benefit from soothing deep pressure or firm touch prior to or during meals. Try wearing a compression vest or putting a weighted lap pad on your knee when eating.





Question 2 - Smell/Taste (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you strongly dislike smells that other people may not notice e.g. supermarket washing powder aisles, crisps, perfumes or deodorants?

Often people who are sensitive to smell can react quite strongly to scents or aromas that barely register with others. If you are sensitive to smell then you 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

Being sensitive to smell can be a real challenge; the world is full of smells and we cannot turn them off or make them go away. Some people can be oblivious to smells (particularly their own!) whilst others can smell an unpleasant odour from 50 metres away. If you are sensitive to certain smells you need to find some strategies that work for you.

- It can be helpful to carry around a tissue or flannel in your pocket that has a few drops of an essential oil on it that you can place under or over your nose when you come across a smell you really don't like.
- Try spraying a small amount of perfume or aftershave onto the collar of your school uniform sweatshirt. When a smell you don't like comes along you can lift the collar up to your nose.
- If you know certain smells make you feel sick then try to avoid particular routes where you will be exposed to them. For example when walking round school avoid the route that takes you past the dinner hall if you don't like the smell of cabbage cooking. If you cannot avoid passing certain places then make sure you have a nicer smell to hand.



Remember to bear in mind that it's not just other people who smell and you too may smell unpleasant to others! Keep on top of personal hygiene; make sure you wash yourself and change your clothes regularly. Go easy on the amount of body spray you use; a little goes a long way!!





Question 3 - Smell/Taste (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you only eat familiar foods and dislike trying new foods?

Most teenagers have strong preferences and dislikes when it comes to food, choosing for example not to eat vegetables or only liking certain flavours of crisps. These are like and dislikes and are perfectly normal and do not impact on your ability to consume a reasonably varied diet, however some people are so fussy and so restricted in the choices that they make that they are unable to consume what would normally be considered 'typical teenage' 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

As a teenager it is important to expand the repertoire of foods you can eat, as the opportunities and experiences that become available to you increase, and you don't want to miss out on trying new things. Ask your parent to help you overcome these issues by trying the following strategies:

If you prefer softer food then let the main part of your meal consist of this but introduce one firmer textured item at the side of your plate. Or if you only like 'dry' food have a small bowl at the side of the plate with some sauce covered food in it. Try hard to take it to your mouth and ask your parent to encourage you; your parent won't get angry if you can't eat it. Ask your parent to use a reward chart with you and grade the experience over the course of a week:

- On Monday it's enough that you tolerate the food on your plate.
- On Tuesday put the food onto your fork and sniff it.
- On Wednesday touch the food to your lips.
- On Thursday touch the food with the tip of your tongue.
- On Friday take a tiny bite! As a reward perhaps you can have an extra portion of something you like, a shot on the Xbox or an episode of a favourite programme (whatever will motivate you!).



If you struggle with different foods touching each other then try using a plate with compartments.





Question 4 - Smell/Taste (12 - 18 Years)

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Do many foods seem tasteless? Do you prefer foods with strong flavours such as curries, cheeses or pickles etc.?

If your sense of taste or smell is not as responsive as other people's you may choose to eat food with much stronger taste in order to experience it better. This is not a problem at all, unless you are limiting your diet and therefore not getting all the nutrients your need for growth and development.



Strategies and Suggestions

If your sense of taste or smell is not as responsive as other people's you may choose to eat food with much stronger taste in order to experience it better. This is not a problem at all, unless you are limiting your diet and therefore not getting all the nutrients you need for growth and development.

- Your preference for strong flavours may help you to concentrate, and pay attention whilst you are studying.
- Remember the importance of eating a varied diet and try other foods which may have a strong taste but also be good for you for example green apples.
- Try preparing meals using strong flavoured ingredients that are also good for you such as fresh ginger, onions, lemons & limes, garlic, chillies etc.



Question 5 - Smell/Taste (12 - 18 Years)

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To help concentration, do you often chew non-food items like pens?

We all use our mouths to help calm and soothe us without even thinking (just think of all the people who suck their thumbs, bite their nails or grind their teeth). This is evident from birth with babies often falling asleep whilst drinking from their bottles or needing a dummy to calm down and settle. Having something in our mouths can be very organising and soothing.



Strategies and Suggestions:

- Chewing pen lids is okay, chewing pencils is less acceptable as the paint, wood and lead are not very healthy! Find a safe object that you can put in your mouth to help concentration. Some examples include drinking water from a sports bottle, chewing on sugar free gum or snacking on dried fruit.



- For the more persistent chewers out there it is possible to buy pencil toppers that are designed specifically to be chewed. These T shaped pieces of plastic have various textures and can cope with a significant amount of chewing. They can be bought online but are quite expensive.



- Jewellery that has been designed to be chewed is useful if you are the kind of person that always has their sweatshirt collar or cuff in your mouth. Again this can be bought online and is often called chewelery.





Question 6 - Smell/Taste (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you often deliberately smell things such as people or non-food items?

This is not normally an issue unless you overstep social boundaries and perhaps spends time sniffing people or items in public places, in which case it is important to find strategies to stop you accidentally offending others. Sniffing an adult can seem cute when you are 5, but is much less socially acceptable when you are 15. If you are a sniffer of people or things please respond 'yes' to this question.



Strategies and Suggestions

If as a parent or teacher you are trying to stop your teenager from stepping over social boundaries try the following strategies:

- Use social stories to explain to them 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 teenager 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.
- Encourage your teenager to chew on mouth fidgets such as gum; having a taste in their mouth makes them less likely to need to smell something.
- Provide opportunities to smell things e.g. scented oil or perfume on a cuff or wristband.





Question 7 - Smell/Taste (12 - 18 Years)

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Do you not seem to notice the smells that other people may comment on?

This tends to be less of an issue for you but more of an issue for others around you, although only if you have an issue with personal hygiene!



Strategies and Suggestions

If your sense of smell doesn't work very well, or is under-responsive, then it takes a lot more of a smell to exist before you become aware of it. This can be a problem mainly if you aren't good about managing your own personal hygiene. You might not notice that you smell 'less than fresh' but the people round about you may be struggling to be near you!

You can try to improve your sense of smell but you may just have to accept the advice and guidance of a trusted adult such as a parent or teacher.

As a parent or teacher supporting a young adult with a poor sense of smell the following guidance may be of benefit:

- If your child is oblivious to certain strong smells this can actually be a benefit in a lot of situations. An issue can occur however when they reach puberty and are oblivious to their own body odour. They may require additional support to keep on top of personal hygiene, but you will find additional strategies in the life skills section of the website. Have a look at the 'Looking After My Body' section (www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/life-skills/self-care/looking-after-my-body) for some advice and downloadable resources that may help.
 - **Looking After My Body**
 - Bathing my Child
 - Bathing Independently
 - Hand Washing
 - Managing Periods
 - Teeth Brushing
 - Nail Cutting
 - Hair Care
 - Teenage Resources
- If your child is not very thorough at cleaning themselves after they have been to the toilet this can also cause an issue with other children in their class. Look under the 'Going to the Toilet' section (www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/life-skills/self-care/going-to-the-toilet) for further information.

