

# Sensory Questionnaire

## Sense of Movement and Balance

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 SENSE OF MOVEMENT AND BALANCE**

Your sense of movement and balance is known as your VESTIBULAR sense. The nerves that control your vestibular system are located in your inner ear and tell your brain what direction you are moving in, whether your head is up, down or turned to the side, and helps your body stay upright against gravity.

Some children can be very sensitive to movement because for them a little bit of movement feels very big and scary. Other children don't register movement as well as others and so they tend to seek out movement all the time! If you think your child moves too much or too little complete this questionnaire and use the strategies to help them develop their sense of movement.

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## Question 1 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

### Question 1

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**Do you dislike heights and avoid using lifts and escalators as you don't like the way it feels?**

*Some people are very sensitive to movement and what seems like a little movement to us can seem massive to them. If you appear to over-react to small changes in position then you may well have an overly sensitive sense of movement.*



### Strategies and Suggestions

Sometimes if we are sensitive to movement small changes in position can seem very big and uncomfortable. Some people experience a sensation similar to that first dip of the roller coaster when going up and down in a lift. You can use input through other sensory systems to reduce the unpleasant sensations your vestibular system is experiencing. Try the following strategies to see if they help:

- Use input through your body awareness (proprioceptive) system to help reduce fear and anxiety. Try holding a stress-ball or fidget to squeeze as a distractor, or try wearing tight fitting undergarments to provide calming deep pressure input.



- Using wraparound sunglasses can help cut down visual stimulation which will in turn reduce movement sensation.



- Ask an adult to help you break down the task into achievable steps. If your issue for example is walking along a corridor that is open plan onto an atrium in school, ask your teacher if you can walk along the corridor when it is empty at first so that you can stay close to the wall. As you become more confident try to walk in the middle of the corridor, and as you feel more secure start to walk it when a few other pupils are present. Try to make sure you always have a trusted friend or adult next to your side so you always have a constant in your peripheral vision.





## Question 2 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

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**Do you dislike activities where your head is upside down or tipped back e.g. when washing your hair?**

*Do you become distressed when you have to put your head back in the bath or shower to have the soap rinsed out your hair? Do you struggle to bend over to tie your laces?*



### Strategies and Suggestions

As the receptors for your sense of movement are located in your inner ear, movements of your head can feel quite challenging. Tipping your hair back to rinse out shampoo can feel very uncomfortable. Try the following suggestions to help:

- It is easier to wash your hair whilst standing under a shower as you can keep your head in a more upright position. If you don't have an over bath shower it is possible to buy a hand held shower spray that fits on to your bath taps.



- If you find putting your head right back into the sink at the hairdressers difficult, then wet your hair at home before you go.
- If your teenager has difficulties understanding the task use social stories and visual aids to increase their understanding.



## Question 3 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

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#### Do you have poor balance?

*People who don't have a problem with balance rarely think about how much they use it in everyday life. Imagine having to bend down to pick up your school bag or dropped phone, or reaching up to get something off the top shelf in the cupboard and struggling not to fall over. Some people whose balance is poor find lots of basic skills hard to complete.*



#### Strategies and Suggestions

If you struggle with balance carrying out everyday tasks can be difficult; trying to pull on socks or trousers, or washing your feet in the shower can be a challenge (and yes you NEED to wash your feet!) Try the following activities to help make life easier.

- This might be stating the obvious but sitting down to do such tasks as pulling on clothes can make life much easier. Sit on the edge of a bed or have a chair in your bedroom to sit on whilst dressing.
- It is possible to fit a rail to the wall underneath a shower (you can even buy suction ones if you don't have the DIY skills to fix it to the wall). Bath and shower boards (seats that fit over the bath) will enable you to sit under the shower so you can focus on washing your body without having to concentrate on remaining upright.



- Try taking part in activities such as strength training, yoga or Pilates which all help to strengthen core tummy muscles. This in turn will improve strength, posture and balance.





## Question 4 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

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#### Do you not get dizzy when others usually would?

*Some people's sense of movement is under-responsive, so these people can continue seeking movement experiences way beyond the point when the rest of us would have started to feel sick. When children are young they may look for lots of movement experiences to help their vestibular system mature, but as they grow older they no longer require to move about quite so much and so can settle down and concentrate on other things. If you appear to be always on the go, enjoy spinning round in circles or tend to spend hours on the swing then answer 'yes' to this question.*



#### Strategies and Suggestions

If your sense of movement (vestibular system) is not processing movement as well as it should then you are likely to spend lots of time engaged in movement activities. It is worth giving your body the movement it is seeking but in different ways. Try the following activities:

- Incorporate regular movement activities into your day e.g. going for a 20 minute walk, try walking the dog, go swimming, take up jogging etc.
- Try installing an exercise app onto your phone and setting an alarm reminder to make movement part of your daily routine. The NHS has a few good apps including 'From Couch to 5K'.
- If you have homework to do, or like to play on your PC or laptop, try using different seating options. Instead of sitting on a desk or dining chair why not sit on an exercise or therapy ball? It is possible to buy these in most major supermarkets or online for a few pounds.
- Wedge shaped air filled cushions can also provide additional movement input and can be used both at home and in school on standard classroom chairs.





## Question 4 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

- It is easier at secondary school to have frequent movement breaks. Classes tend to only last for 50 minutes so you can always get a chance to stretch your legs in between. If you are the kind of person who needs more movement than this speak to your Guidance or Pastoral Support teacher and see if you can use an air filled cushion in class or be 'sent on errands' during class to incorporate more movement into your day.
- Try doing chair 'push-ups' in class when you feel the need to move. Place the palms of your hands flat on the chair on either side of your thighs. Press down through straightened arms to lift your bottom off the seat. Repeat several times.





## Question 5 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

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#### If you fall do you tend NOT to put your hands out to save yourself?

*Most people who trip when walking along would automatically put their hand, albeit awkwardly, and end up feeling nothing more than embarrassed. Some people however, whose vestibular systems are slow to respond to stimulus, can end up flat on the ground before their brain realises they have moved too fast and too far in the wrong direction through space.*



#### Strategies and Suggestions

Your vestibular system is not registering movement quickly enough, and is under-responsive to movement. You need to give yourself opportunities to experience movement, and more importantly experience the sensation when movement stops or changes suddenly, as this is how your vestibular system learns to recognise changes in direction. Try the following activities to help develop your sense of movement:

- You might consider yourself too old to visit your local playground but, if you are brave and don't mind what others think, having a go on the roundabout is a great way to get your vestibular system working. Make sure you hold on tight and get a trusted adult or friend to spin you around in one direction. Get them to suddenly stop the roundabout and start spinning it in the other direction.
- If you really are too old or too cool to go to a swing park try using a spinning desk or office chair in the same way. Take it easy at first as you might feel dizzy for some time afterwards.





## Question 6 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

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**Do you like to move? Do you move or fidget when you sit to work, and do you find that it helps you to focus?**

*Some young people who require to move a lot, may appear to be fidgeting and not paying attention. These young people though can usually concentrate as long as they are able to fidget at the same time.*

### Strategies and Suggestions

- There are lots of fidget toys available which can be provided to give you discreet opportunities to fidget with something in class without distracting others. These can include pencil toppers, hand held fidget toys that can be kept in a pencil case or in your pocket, and key chain fidget toys that can be attached to a zip on a fleece or pencil case.
- The use of an air filled wedge shaped cushion can also allow you an opportunity to move whilst 'sitting still' in class. These cushions are useful to use during periods when you are expected to concentrate on a piece of work.
- It is a well-researched fact that optimum concentration levels are sustained for approximately 20 minutes, and that young people work better after a 'movement break'. If your teacher is happy to introduce whole class exercises just before you all sit down and focus that is great; your teacher can find movement suggestions by visiting [www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/resources/ot-activityinformation-sheets/classroom-based-isometric-exercise-ideas-for-teachers](http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/resources/ot-activityinformation-sheets/classroom-based-isometric-exercise-ideas-for-teachers). If this isn't appropriate try doing some chair 'push-ups' by putting your hands either side of your legs and gripping the edge of the chair. Straighten your arms and lift your bottom off the seat. Repeat half a dozen times.
- Try using movement before you sit down to do homework after school; go to the gym or bounce on a trampoline.
- Try sitting on a therapy/exercise ball or air filled cushion when doing your homework.





## Question 7 - Vestibular/Balance (12 - 18 Years)

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#### Do you dislike traveling in a car or suffer from motion sickness?

*Your sense of movement works very closely with your sense of vision, and if you are sensitive at all to movement the additional visual input you get when travelling can make the sense of movement feel much stronger.*



#### Strategies and Suggestions

There are various strategies you can try to help reduce the 'sensory overload' that causes travel sickness:

- Try wraparound sunglasses when travelling to reduce the amount of peripheral visual input.
- Look straight ahead rather than up, down or to the sides.
- Try using alternative sensory input such as music or films to watch in the car, although make sure if you are watching a screen it is located straight in front of you and not down on your lap.



- You can purchase travel bands from your local pharmacy which provide pressure on acupressure points at your wrists, and are supposed to reduce the sensation of travel sickness.



- For those of you who suffer significantly with motion sickness it is possible to buy over the counter medicine from your chemist.