

What is sensory processing?

The sensory processing system is what our brain and our body use to notice and respond to sensory information. We pick up sensory information through our senses, and the five ones that most people know about are vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. But there are some other senses that you may not have heard of, such as interoception. That's our internal senses, so things like having a sense of when we're hungry, tired, happy, or anxious. And then there's the vestibular sense, that's our sense of balance, and proprioception, that's our ability to tell where our body is in relation to other things. Autistic people process sensory information in a way that's different from most other people. And many autistic people have sensory sensitivities, or they need sensory stimulation, or a bit of both. So particular clothes, foods, or noises might be really difficult to tolerate, or they might be very sensitive to bright lights or reflections.

I struggle with bright lights. I am not a fan of lights. I prefer the dark, low light is just so much better for me. When it comes to tastes, I struggle more with texture than tastes, but I know some people who just absolutely refuse foods because even the taste of something a bit like garlic will absolutely put them off. They won't even touch stuff like that. Touch, again being another one. Some things being nice and warm like soft balls. They're quite handy to have as stress toys. Some objects that are quite hard can cause stress somewhat. Noise is one that, again, is dependent on the person. I know some people who struggle particularly with loud noises like the high decibels, the more stress. I struggle in large crowds where I would call lots of transmitters if everyone's talking at once. Unless I have a way to focus on someone, I hear everything going on around me, but it makes this conglomerate mess, and it gives me a really bad headache, which is why I wear my headphones all the time.

Autistic children experience the world differently to neurotypical children, and this can be across all of the senses. They may struggle with trying new foods or putting on new clothes, or loud noises, or find that being tickled or cuddled uncomfortable, or may find it really hard to concentrate or focus.