A fact sheet about

Your sensory profile

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Your sensory profile

What a sensory profile is, why seeking matters, and how to change one thing.



Key points

- Your sensory profile (definition below) is the mix of what your senses find too much, not enough or just right.
- Some people mostly avoid sensory input, some mostly seek it, and many do both, depending on the sense and the day.
- Seeking input, like pressure, movement, music or stimming, is a need to meet, just as much as avoiding input is.
- A small step is to write down what is too much and what you seek out, then change one thing or ask for one change.

What a sensory profile is

You may leave a café after ten minutes because of the coffee grinder. Then you may play the same song loud all the way home. You may cut the tag out of every shirt and still sleep best under a heavy blanket. Or you may feel flat and restless after a quiet week, and come alive at a busy market.

Each sense works in its own way, and the mix is yours. Knowing it can help you change the places you are in, and ask for what you need.

Your senses include sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. They also include movement, where your body is, and signals like hunger or heat. Your sensory profile is how each of them works for you. A sense can work in one of three ways, or more than one:

- more sensitive than most people's, so a sound, a light or a texture is too much
- less sensitive, so you may not notice pain, cold or a smell until later
- something you seek out, like deep pressure, movement, a texture you love or one song on repeat

In surveys, autistic adults found daily sights, sounds, touch, smells and tastes too much more often than other adults did. ADHD adults reported more of both: input that was too much, and input they barely noticed. Sound was one sense that stood out for them.

In one study, almost every autistic adult was very high or very low in at least one area. But which areas, and which way, varied a great deal from person to person. So nobody else can tell you what your mix is. If you are neurodivergent in another way, you definitely may recognise this too.

Why seeking matters as much as avoiding

Many neurodivergent adults seek out input they enjoy, and many use it to calm down. It might be tight hugs from people they trust, soft or cold textures, a favourite smell, or music they chose. Often the same person finds some input too much and seeks out other input.

Stimming is part of this, and it means repeated movements or sounds, like rocking, flapping, tapping or humming. Neurodivergent adults say stimming helps them settle, and helps them let out strong feelings. So it is a need to meet, not a habit to cut back. If you are ADHD or neurodivergent in another way, you may recognise this too.

Your needs can also change with the day. Many autistic adults find noise and light easier after good sleep, and harder when they are tired or stressed. Input you control, like music at a volume you chose, is often easier than input that comes without warning. You can read more about why busy places can wipe you out here.

Most of the people in the study of autistic adults' own words were white, and few had an intellectual disability. More broadly, research on autism and neurodivergence has often left out BBIA (Black, Brown, Indigenous and Asian) people, LGBTQIA+ people and other marginalised groups. Your lived experience is what is most valid.

The one thing to try: list what drains you and what settles you, so you know what to change first

On a calm day, write two short lists. You do not need to score anything, and there are no right answers:

Too much: the sounds, lights, smells, textures, crowds or touch that cost you something.

Seek out or settles me: the pressure, movement, music, textures, tastes or stims that help you.

Then pick the place that costs you the most: home, out and about, work or study, or time with people close to you. Change one thing there, or ask for one change:

- at home: a softer lamp, clothes with no tags, a heavy blanket, or a corner where you can stim freely
- out: going at a quieter time, sunglasses, earplugs or headphones, or your own music
- at work or study: a seat away from the door, softer light, headphones, or a quiet room you can use
- with people close to you: saying which touch helps and which does not, like "a firm hug is good, a light tap on the arm is not"

At work or in study, changes like these are called reasonable adjustments. In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act backs them up. There is not much research yet on how well each change works, so what you know about yourself counts. You can read more about asking for adjustments in study here. You can read more about agreeing changes at work here.

If you have higher support needs, or you communicate without speaking, a support person can notice with you. They might offer objects or pictures to choose from, like headphones or a blanket, then they can note which ones you reach for. Someone close may also notice what you miss, like shivering before you feel the cold.

You can create and keep both lists in your notes in the Understanding Zoe app, by talking or typing. Then they are ready when you ask for a change.

The two lists idea come from what neurodivergent adults say has helped them. They have not been validated in research yet, so they are anchored in lived experience and in what the community shares about it. And lived experience is valid too.

Your lists may change, so look at them again after a big life change.

Getting support

This page describes what many adults say about themselves. It is not an assessment, and it cannot tell you what is going on for you.

You can ask for support at any point, whether your senses are hard to manage every day or only now and then. A GP is a good place to start. A GP can talk with you about a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which can lower the cost of sessions. Different health professionals can help you plan changes that suit your senses, and your GP can help you work out who is right for you.

You can also book a telehealth session through Understanding Zoe.

Tell your GP if you often notice pain, heat or cold late, as an injury or illness can then go unnoticed.

Sources

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Understanding Zoe is the first neuroaffirming AI-powered app that turns every report, observation and moment into an actionable next step, supporting neurodivergent people and those who care about them to thrive.

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