

Sensory Integration Dysfunction

Many children with autism experience unusual responses to **sensory stimuli** or input. These responses are due to difficulty in processing and integrating sensory information. Vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste, the sense of movement (**vestibular system**) and the sense of position (**proprioception**) can all be affected. This means that while information is sensed normally, it may be perceived much differently. Sometimes stimuli that seem “normal” to others can be experienced as painful, unpleasant or confusing by a child with **Sensory Integration Dysfunction (SID)**, the clinical term for this characteristic. (SID may also be called Sensory Processing Disorder or Sensory Integration Disorder.) SIDs can involve hypersensitivity (also known as **sensory defensiveness**) or hyposensitivity. An example of hypersensitivity would be an inability to tolerate wearing clothing, being touched or being in a room with normal lighting. **Hyposensitivity** might be apparent in a child’s increased tolerance for pain or a constant need for sensory stimulation. Treatment for Sensory Integration Dysfunction is usually addressed with occupational therapy and/or sensory integration therapy.

Pica

Pica is an eating disorder involving eating things that are not food. Children between 18 and 24 months of age often eat nonfood items, but this is typically a normal part of development. Some children with autism and other developmental disabilities persist beyond the developmentally typical timeframe and continue to eat items such as dirt, clay, chalk or paint chips. Children showing signs of persistent mouthing of fingers or objects, including toys, should be tested for elevated blood levels of lead, especially if there is a known potential for environmental exposure to lead. You should speak to your doctor about these concerns so he or she can help you with treatment. Your child’s doctor will help you to assess if your child needs a behavioral intervention or if it is something that can be managed at home.



Visit the [Autism Speaks Tool Kits](https://autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits) page to download tool kits with information and resources related to pica for both parents and professionals at autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits.

Mental health

Oftentimes a child diagnosed with ASD may receive an additional diagnosis such as **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**. **ADHD** and anxiety are quite common and addressing these diagnoses properly can help your child make great strides. Recent studies suggest that 1 in 5 children on the autism spectrum also has ADHD and 30% struggle with an **anxiety disorder** such as social phobia, separation anxiety, panic disorder and specific phobias. The classic symptoms of ADHD include chronic problems with inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity. However, these or similar symptoms can likewise result from autism. For this reason, it is important that evaluation be made by someone with expertise in both disorders. A recent study found that just 1 in 10 children with autism and ADHD was receiving medication to relieve the ADHD symptoms.