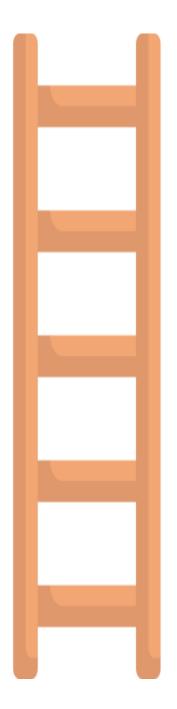
Sensory Desensitisation Ladder

Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Children who are very sensitive to smells and taste may prefer to eat bland food, and may find strong food smells/tastes overpowering. Other children with under-sensitivity to taste or smell may prefer stronger flavours. Some children might find the feeling of hard food, or sloppy food, very unpleasant. In order to increase the variety of foods accepted by your child, try changing the presentation of the food (e.g., shape, colour and texture) to improve the sensory experience.

For gradual desensitisation, introduce each new food or texture in small steps:



Step 6: with time they may attempt to chew and swallow the food, but don't put any pressure on your child to do so

Step 5: invite them to bite a small piece of the food (it's ok if they spit it out)

Step 4: gently encourage them to put the food to their mouth e.g., kiss it or lick it

Step 3: gently encourage them to touch the food e.g., via messy play

Step 2: invite them to smell the food

Step 1: allow the child to get used to looking at the food









ages designed by Freepik and Darius Dan from Elaticon

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This approach may help your child to become comfortable with different foods being in and around their mouth. Once your child feels confident and comfortable at that step, you can move up the ladder. These steps may take time to complete and some steps may need to be repeated many times before you can move on to the next.

If your child is struggling to progress with a particular step, consider trying a new food and re-visiting the previous food in the future. Your child is likely to be at different stages of the ladder with different flavours and textures, therefore work with your child according to the stage that they are at for each. For example, your child may be happy to play with dry rice but they do not like looking at sauces or custard.

Try to see the goal as your child learning about and being comfortable around different foods, rather than getting them to eat all of the different foods presented.

Tips:

- Aim to try these steps outside of the meal experience, as part of messy play.
- A lot of children with sensory sensitivities do not like having dirty hands when doing messy play. Try
 to delay wiping/washing their hands when you can to help familiarise them with the feel of the food.
 This can help them get used to these textures.
- Never pressure your child into doing what they are too uncomfortable to do. Allow them to explore the above stages at their own pace.
- Trial using toys, dolls or teddies to model the steps and involve them in messy play.

If you feel that your child is missing out on certain food groups, nutrients and/or you are concerned about their growth, speak to your dietitian or GP.

Notes

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