

Sensory Snack Ideas: supporting calm and alert bodies through food

Children often use food not just for nutrition, but also for sensory regulation. Different textures and flavours can help either calm (soothe, organise) or alert (wake up, increase attention). Here's some ideas to support your learner's regulation throughout the day. Every learner experiences sensory input differently, so it's important to work together to notice what helps them feel calm or alert, and to follow their lead in discovering what works best for them.



sweet

comforting, calming

Sweet foods, particularly if they're smooth in texture, can feel soothing and familiar.

yoghurt
smoothies
bananas or soft fruits
muffins
overnight oats
sweet popcorn



chewy

calming, focusing

Chewy foods give deep pressure to the jaw, which can help calm, focus and reduce stress.

dried fruits
bagels
fruit straps
muesli bars
chewy mints



crunchy

focus, alertness

Crunchy foods give strong feedback through the jaw that can provide an alerting and organising effect.

veggies sticks
apple
crackers
roasted chickpeas/beans
grissini sticks
dry cereal



salty

alerting, satisfying

Salty foods can increase alertness and satisfy sensory cravings.

pretzels
popcorn
rice crackers (with cheese)
olives
rice cakes/thins
salted edamame
tuna
vegemite



spicy

alerting, awakening

Spicy foods provide intense sensory input that help to alert and 'wake up' the body.

curry flavour (eg Bhuja Mix)
salsa with corn chips
wasabi peas
peppermint
cinnamon
ginger
chilli



sour

alerting, refocusing

Sour foods activate the mouth and brain to increase alertness and refocus attention.

citrus fruit
pineapple
pickles
yoghurt
lemon water

Warm foods tend to be calming, whilst cold foods are more alerting.

Practical Tips: Offer snacks before dysregulation escalates. Encourage families to let their child help choose and pack their lunch- they may like to stick to favourite safe foods or prefer to rotate foods to keep interest high. They might like to combine textures, or use small containers to separate the flavours.

This handout is intended as a general guide. Please consider allergies, dietary needs, individual preferences and any Oral Eating and Drinking Care Plans.