

Section 2: Daily Living and Sensory Differences Self Help Resource Pack for autistic people

This pack has been put together from information available from specialist autism services, autistic people, and professionals working with autistic people.



Self Help Resource Pack created by NHS Lothian Adult ADHD and Autism Resource Team.

Daily living

Every person is unique and therefore each autistic person is unique. The information and tips below are intended to offer ideas for you to try, based on approaches that other autistic people have found helpful.

Many autistic people report differences in how they process sensory information, including touch, sound, light, textures, and tastes.

In general, most autistic people also find having a predictable routine and concrete plan helpful to help with reducing uncertainty and last minute organisation. Identifying and rehearsing what to do when there are unexpected challenges can give you some reassurance, especially if you note this down to refer to in times of stress.

Smart phone apps store information and can be carried with you.

You might have difficulty with ...	You could try this...
Processing sensory information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider how the environment affects what you want to do and make changes to suit your sensory profile. Ask professionals when you are attending appointments whether they can help e.g. turning off bright lights• Consider changing the lighting, décor, and products to make things more tolerable
Looking after yourself Washing Dressing Brushing your teeth Cutting your nails	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a structured morning and evening routine to carry out daily self-care tasks• Use a timer or phone alarm to help you with starting and finishing each task• Schedule regular dates in diary for haircutting and nail cutting to help include these in your routine
Remembering to plan your household jobs into a regular schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a diary to timetable jobs like shopping and laundry

Other situations you might find difficult:	You could try this...
Eating with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If eating out, look at the menu on a website and choose what you are going to eat and drink before you leave home
Going shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a shopping list and stick to it • Visit the shop at quieter times or shop online (possibly with support)
Living alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social work department can also offer an assessment of need • See <i>section 1: Introduction and Initial Support</i> for where to get help
Finding your way and using public transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try Smartphone apps such as Google maps and transport planning apps like the Lothian Buses app • The Thistle Assistance Card and App (SESTRANS) provide information to others about your needs
Hair appointments and other visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to the salon beforehand about reasonable adjustments they could make (see <i>Section 3: Physical and Mental Health</i>)
Regulating your body temperature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-set the temperature on your heating thermostat to your chosen comfort level • Wear several layers of clothes so that you can put them on and off as you need

Practising a short relaxation or grounding exercise regularly in the daytime and then using this before activities you may find stressful (such as those listed above) is more likely to help reduce anxiety and help you cope (see *Section 3: Physical and Mental Health – anxiety*)

Recommended websites and further reading - daily living

- **Autism Friendly Cinema Screenings**

Some of the cinemas in Edinburgh offer screenings where the lights are not fully down and the volume is reduced. People are free to walk about and have a break if needed. Check with the cinema or contact the organisation below.

Email: autismfilms@dimensions-uk.org

Website: [Share our autism friendly resources – Dimensions](#)

- **Cinema Card**

The cinema card is available if you are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, or Personal Independence Payment

Tel: 0845 123 1292

Email: info@ceacard.co.uk

Website: [Home - CEA Card](#)

- **Quiet shopping times**

Check on the website of your local supermarket for organised 'quieter shopping' times. At these times they may turn off music and dim the lighting.

- **Travel by public transport**

The South East of Scotland Transport Partnership (SESTRANS) has developed the Thistle Assistance Card and App to make using public transport easier for people with additional support needs. The card and App are supported by a wide variety of voluntary organisations across Scotland and by most bus, train, tram, ferry and airport operators.

Website: sestran.gov.uk/projects/the-thistle-assistance-card-app/

- **Travel by air**

Contact the airport to discuss your needs – some airports have autism-friendly procedures that will help you such as a trial visit, shorter waiting times, quiet rooms to wait, fact sheets about what to expect.

Website: [Hidden disabilities and additional needs | Edinburgh Airport](#)

Sensory differences and environment

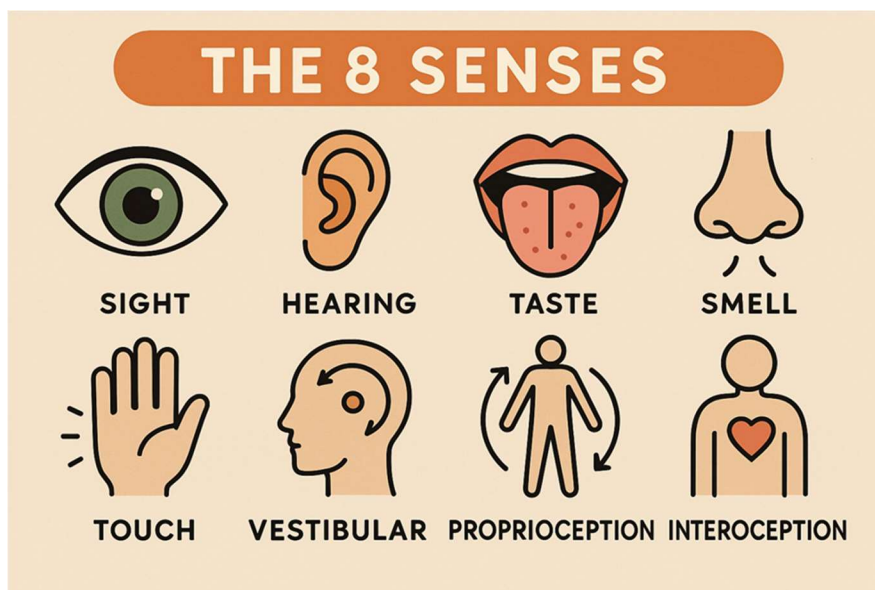
Many autistic people report differences in their sensory experiences.

If you are very sensitive to specific sensations such as touch, sound, and taste, you probably find some situations difficult as there is too much information for your brain to handle, which can lead to sensory 'overload' and feeling unable to cope.

Sometimes the senses might work differently; such as balance, movement, and deep pressure touch receptors. Some people need to seek out sensations in order to feel calm and settled and ready for concentrating on a task. For example, some people need to move about frequently and find it hard to sit still even for short periods. Others might find more vigorous movement such as swimming, jogging or weight training relaxing and essential for feeling able to cope.

Autistic people often see the detail before trying to make sense of the bigger picture. This means that the environment might be confusing, challenging and can affect how you manage to carry out activities.

Adapting the environment to suit your individual requirements can help a lot and make a difference to your mood and confidence.



You might have sensitivity to:	You could try this...
Light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to natural light with large windows and switch off fluorescent lights • Use blackout curtains and blinds • Limit patterns on soft furnishings • Change to lower wattage light bulbs • Use sunglasses or light-sensitive lenses
Proximity and touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the home space tidy and have fewer pieces of furniture to create a clear open space for moving around • Use rubber gloves for washing up and for cleaning • Keep your own things separate in a specific place or box if you share your accommodation with others
Noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double glazing reduces sound of traffic and community • Thick, lined curtains can help reduce sounds from outside • Carpets absorb sound; laminate flooring can produce echo and vibration • New household appliances have a sound pollution rating – choose those with low sound and vibration output • Use headphones to block out sound
Smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an extractor fan to get rid of cooking smells from the kitchen • Keep the kitchen door closed • Use order-free household products and odour reduction sprays/air fresheners • Avoid open plan layouts when choosing where to live

Take control over your senses and use them to your benefit.

Some sensations can be used mindfully to help you feel calmer or more alert. The following examples can help you think about what makes you feel calmer or to become more alert. You could tick those that you find helpful.

Calming		Alerting	
Hot shower/bath		Cold or cool shower/bath	
Holding/patting a pet		Holding ice in hand or to face	
Warmth of a fireplace		Being in a cool room	
Wrapping in a heavy blanket		Wrapping in cool bed sheets	
Massage/deep pressure touch		Light touch	
Yoga		Aerobic exercise	
Leisure walks		Power walks	
Tapping/brushing		Rubber band wrist snapping	
Slow/rhythmic music		Fast paced/upbeat music	
Humming/singing quietly		Humming/singing loudly	
Soothing scents (oils, lotions, candles)		Strong scents	
Soft materials/textures		Rough or prickly materials/textures	
Rocking in a rocking chair		A bumpy car ride	
Swinging on a swing		Spinning on a swing	
Slow, rhythmic motions		Fast and jerky movements	
Soft/low lighting		Bright or flashing lights	
Decaf herbal teas		Drinking coffee	
Chewing gum		Biting into an ice pole/popsicle	
Chewy or crunchy foods		Sour or hot foods	

Recommended websites and further reading- sensory differences and environment.

Books:

- ***Sensory issues for autistic adults***

Book by Diarmuid Heffernan (Jessica Kingsley Publisher 2016) which offers practical advice to help understand sensory difficulties and learn strategies for dealing with specific challenges.

- ***Too loud, too bright, too fast, too tight: what to do if you are sensory defensive in an over stimulating world.***

Book by Sharon Heller (Harper Collins 2003) which helps to understand, and offers tools and therapies for alleviating sensory defensiveness

Websites:

- **Sensory Integration Network**

Forum promoting education, good practice and research into sensory integration

Website: [Sensory Integration Education | The Home of SI Training](#)

- **The National Autistic Society**

Information and advice for sensory differences

Website: [Autism and sensory processing](#)

- **Nest hub| Empowering Ayrshire's Neurodiverse Communities**

Website: [nest.scot | Empowering Ayrshire's Neurodiverse Communities | About Us](#)