The Master 3-Column Sensory Diet Menu

Scheduled Sensory-Motor Inputs to Prevent Meltdowns & Maintain the 'Just Right' Focus Band

A sensory diet is not food—it is proactive neurological nourishment through movement and calming inputs.

■■ THE NERVOUS SYSTEM 'ENGINE' ANALOGY: PROACTIVE VS. REACTIVE

- Low Sluggish Engine (Under-Aroused): Groggy, slow transitions, daydreaming ➔ Needs ALERTING inputs to wake up.
- Just-Right Engine (Regulated Focus): Attentive, emotionally resilient ➔ Needs ORGANIZING heavy work to stay centered.
- Overheating Engine (Over-Aroused): Bouncing off walls, screaming, fight-or-flight ➔ Needs CALMING deep pressure to de-escalate.

1. ALERTING INPUTS

Wake Up a Sluggish Engine

- 10 mini-trampoline bounces
- Cold water washcloth to face
- Sips of ice water through straw
- Crunchy sour green apple slices
- Fast, irregular linear swinging
- Upbeat rhythmic marching music
- Jumping jacks or star jumps
- Peppermint scent / citrus diffuser
- Skipping or galloping down hall
- Bouncing on exercise yoga ball
- Quick wall touch sprints
- Frozen fruit smoothie bowl

2. ORGANIZING (HEAVY WORK)

Center a Scattered Engine

- Carrying heavy book baskets
- Wall push-ups / chair push-ups
- Animal walks (bear, crab, frog)
- Seated inflatable wobble cushion
- Pulling resistance stretch band
- Chewing silicone sensory pendant
- Kneading firm therapeutic putty
- Pushing loaded laundry hampers
- Crawling through fabric tunnel
- Squeezing stress relief balls
- Wheelbarrow walking with parent
- Climbing indoor ladder / rope

3. CALMING INPUTS

Cool Down Overheating Engine

- Indoor compression pod swing
- 3-5 lb weighted lap pad on thighs
- Dim warm lighting (lamp only)
- Sound-damped ear protection
- Soft blanket 'burrito roll' wrap
- Slow, rhythmic back strokes
- Quiet retreat in calm down corner
- Deep joint compressions / hugs
- Gentle kinetic sand squeezing
- Slow rhythmic deep breathing
- Listening to steady pink noise
- Warm lavender bath before bed

■ THE PROACTIVE MICRO-DOSING PROTOCOL: HOW TO USE THIS MENU

The 90-Minute Rule: Proactive Dosing Beats Meltdown Scrambling

Nervous systems don't stay regulated all day from one morning activity. Scheduled 3-to-5 minute sensory micro-breaks eve ry 90 to 120 minutes prevent cumulative sensory fatigue from escalating into a fight-or-flight crisis.

Always Follow Alerting with Heavy Work

If your child needs an alerting activity (like jumping or cold water) to wake up, ALWAYS conclude the micro-break with 1 -2 minutes of organizing heavy work (wall push-ups or carrying books) to anchor their nervous system into focus.

Respect the Power of Oral-Motor Input

The jaw joint (temporomandibular) provides the most potent, direct proprioceptive feedback to the brain. Chewing crunchy pretzels or drinking thick smoothies through a narrow straw provides instant grounding during homework stress.

Never Force a Sensory Input as a Demand

For kids with PDA or sensory sensitivities, being commanded to 'go swing now' triggers autonomy resistance. Offer choice s: 'Do you want to do 5 bear crawls or carry the book bin to the table?'

CUSTOMIZABLE DAILY SCHEDULE

Daily Sensory Diet Timetable Grid

Fill in personalized sensory micro-breaks for home and school routines.

■ MORNING LAUNCH (7:00 AM – 8:00 AM)

TARGET: Alerting + Oral-Motor Wake-Up

Goal: Ease morning grogginess, awaken joint awareness & prevent breakfast/clothing meltdowns.

Planned Activities (3-5 min): _____ **[ ] Done**

_____ **[ ] Done**

Tools / Fidgets Used: _____

■ CLASSROOM / DESK FOCUS (10:00 AM – 1:30 PM)

TARGET: Organizing Heavy Work & Seated Input

Goal: Channel restless body energy quietly, anchor executive focus & avoid squirming.

Planned Activities (3-5 min): _____ **[ ] Done**

_____ **[ ] Done**

Tools / Fidgets Used: _____

■■ AFTER-SCHOOL RESET (3:30 PM – 4:30 PM)

TARGET: Calming & Decompression

Goal: De-escalate restraint collapse, discharge school masking tension & replenish sensory energy.

Planned Activities (3-5 min): _____ **[ ] Done**

_____ **[ ] Done**

Tools / Fidgets Used: _____

■ BEDTIME WIND-DOWN (7:30 PM – 8:30 PM)

TARGET: Deep Touch Pressure & Parasympathetic Calm

Goal: Lower heart rate, discharge cortisol & transition peacefully into deep restorative sleep.

Planned Activities (3-5 min): _____ **[ ] Done**

_____ **[ ] Done**

Tools / Fidgets Used: _____

■ DAILY REGULATION OBSERVATION & WIN LOG

Child Name: _____ Date: _____ Arousal State Today: [ ] Under-Aroused [ ] Regulated [ ] Overwhelmed

Top Sensory Win Today (What activity helped most?):

_____

Triggers or Adjustments Needed for Tomorrow:

_____

_____

30 ZERO-COST SENSORY HACKS & CLASSROOM CHEAT SHEET

No expensive equipment needed. Evidence-based home items & teacher-friendly school scripts.

■ 30 ZERO-COST EVERYDAY HOUSEHOLD SENSORY HACKS

PROPRIOCEPTIVE (HEAVY WORK)

1. Pushing full laundry basket
2. Blanket 'burrito roll' with pillows
3. Animal walks down hallway
4. Wall pushes (count to 10)
5. Carrying heavy book stacks
6. Couch cushion sandwich squish
7. Crab walks or wheelbarrows
8. Helping carry grocery bags
9. Kneading bread / cookie dough
10. Isometric desk chair pull-ups

VESTIBULAR & TACTILE

11. Swivel office chair spin (5x)
12. Hanging upside down on couch
13. Pillow obstacle course jumping
14. Dry rice / bean sensory bin
15. Hair gel squish bag in Ziploc
16. Frozen damp washcloth chew
17. Popping packaging bubble wrap
18. Walking barefoot on grass/rug
19. Textured velvet/corduroy scraps
20. Shaving cream on plastic tray

ORAL-MOTOR & ENVIRONMENT

21. Smoothie through thin straw
22. Crunchy carrot / pretzel bites
23. Chewing cold apple slices
24. Blowing cotton balls with straw
25. Sucking frozen yogurt drops
26. Amber warm lamp vs overheads
27. Pink noise / rain sounds hum
28. Soft hoodie pulled over ears
29. Quiet retreat behind armchairs
30. Peppermint oil room spray

■ CLASSROOM CHEAT SHEET: PRE-WRITTEN SENSORY ACCOMMODATION SCRIPTS

Share these exact, low-demand accommodation wordings with teachers for 504 plans or informal classroom plans:

1. Discreet Heavy Work Errands:
'When student shows signs of motor restlessness or task fatigue, allow an errand involving heavy resistance (e.g., carrying book bins to library, delivering paper reams, wiping down boards) without drawing peer attention.'

2. Flexible / Active Alternative Seating:
'Permit student to sit on an inflatable balance disc (wobble cushion) or use a resistance foot band tied to desk le gs to channel vestibular energy while remaining seated during instruction.'

3. Oral-Motor & Quiet Fidget Tools:
'Permit quiet, non-distracting sensory tools (sensory silicone chew topper, silent Ono roller, or therapeutic putty) inside desk during independent reading and seatwork to ground focus.'

4. Transition Sensory Buffer (Hallway Auditory Damping):
'Allow student to leave classroom 2 minutes prior to bell schedule or wear sound-damping earplugs during noisy cafe teria, assembly, and hallway transitions to prevent sensory overload collapse.'

EXPLORE OUR LIBRARY OF SENSORY WORKBOOKS & VISUAL CHECKLISTS

The ADHD & PDA Anti-Planner • Visual Daily Routine Packs • My Calm Down Corner Workbook

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