

Using Your Senses to Cope

Purpose : Conversation guide for substance abusers outlining the use of senses to cope when under stress

Admin time : x min variable

User Friendly : High

Administered by : GP or nurse

Content : Guidelines for using senses to cope when stressed

Author : Insight, Queensland, Australia 2020 **access**

Copyright : free to use



<https://www.cgakit.com/using-senses-to-cope>

USING YOUR SENSES TO COPE

WORKER NOTES

This tool is designed to help guide a conversation with clients who use alcohol and/or other drugs. It does not replace a full clinical assessment or intervention using Sensory Approaches. Please consider all risk, safety, consent, and confidentiality issues before commencing. If now is not a good time, this resource can be taken away by the client and read at a later date. A guide to using this tool can be found at www.insight.qld.edu.au

This tool will offer you simple ways to cope when you're feeling stressed. It can be helpful regardless of whether you are continuing to use alcohol and/or other drugs, stopping or cutting down your level of use.

STRESSFUL TIMES

When worrying things happen, it's normal for our bodies to react.

- ✓ Our central nervous system prepares us by releasing stress hormones.
- ✗ However, if we're under a lot of stress over a long time, our physical and mental health can suffer.

For example, you could find it harder to relax, to enjoy yourself, to plan and remember things, to do everyday tasks, or to sleep. Even having a conversation could feel overwhelming.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

When it's harder to think and talk our way through problems, we might use alcohol and drugs as a quick way to change how we're feeling and functioning eg. someone may drink alcohol to feel calm and happy. The flipside is that this has the potential to increase some of our problems. This is sometimes referred to as a 'rebound effect'.

When we're stressed, it's helpful to have a variety of ways to cope that work quickly and don't require too much mental effort. This is where SENSORY MODULATION may help.



PEOPLE CAN EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT TYPES OF STRESS RESPONSES

High Energy

You might feel anxious / edgy / notice or be bothered by sensations that were no problem before.

Low energy

You might feel flat / tired / be less aware of or connected to sensations.

You may even feel a combination of these.

YOU CAN USE YOUR SENSES TO HELP YOU FEEL AND FUNCTION BETTER

We can learn to use sensory inputs to regulate – or feel more in charge of –

- our bodily sensations
- our emotions
- our thoughts
- our actions

The senses help us to: soothe and calm down or activate our nervous system, feel grounded, feel safer, experience pleasure, connect to others, and think.

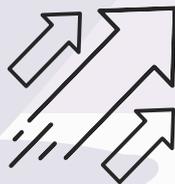
Sensory modulation is helpful when you're affected by alcohol or drugs, or experiencing cravings, if you feel emotional, tired, sick, or support someone else who needs your help, such as a child.

THE BENEFITS OF USING YOUR BODY TO HELP YOUR MIND



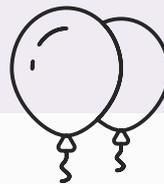
EASY

It requires minimal energy, thinking or talking - the things that can be hard right now.



FAST

Sensory inputs help you feel better quickly. The good effects can last a long time though, up to hours.



FUN

Sensations help us to enjoy life - to play and recharge our batteries, to be creative, to offer respite from everyday demands and traumatic events.



FREE

Many sensory inputs cost very little or nothing, unless you want to spend money on your favourite ones!

SENSORY MODULATION CAN BE BENEFICIAL TO ANYONE - FAMILIES, CARERS, WORKERS - WHEN YOU'RE EXPERIENCING STRESS OR SIMPLY WANTING TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

1. WHAT HELPS?

Which sensory inputs do you find positive, pleasant, helpful?

We've made some suggestions under each of the senses below. Circle the ones that appeal to you.



See

nature
art
photos
films
colours
indoor plants
dim lighting
the sea



Hear

music
voice
water
singing
white noise
sound apps
bird song
silence



Touch

warm shower
cold pack
sunshine
craft
pets
stress ball
soft fabrics
sand/stones



Smell

cooking
herbs/garden
soap
moisturiser
candles
citrus
eucalyptus
lavender



Taste

drinks
ice
mints
gum
spices
sweet/bitter
crunchy/smooth
sour/salty



Move

garden
clean
walk
swing
dance
stretch
ride a bike
swim

Are there other sensory inputs you find helpful? Write them down here.

TIPS

Use some of these when you experience cravings and other unpleasant feelings. When it's hard to think and complete a task, try some of these first.

Energy too high? Try inputs that feel soothing and calming.

Energy too low? Try inputs that feel energizing and alerting.

Any time - Use inputs that feel grounding and comforting.

2. WHAT DOESN'T HELP?

This time consider which sensory inputs trigger negative reactions, urges to use substances, or make it hard to function.

We've provided some suggestions. Circle any that you don't find helpful.

Certain scents / voice / songs / images / objects / noises / food / drinks / drugs, too bright / too dark, loud noise, excess movement / heat, being touched

Are there any other specific sensory inputs you don't find helpful? Write them down here.

TIPS

Minimise or avoid unhelpful sensations. When you can't do this, consider ways to reduce their effect on you eg. by wearing headphones, sunglasses, comfy clothes. Limit time on social media / news updates - you could even use an alarm.

3. IDEAS FOR COPING WITH A CRISIS OR CRAVINGS



Gather helpful sensory items into a bag or box. Keep this close by. You won't have to remember what to do in an emergency - you can seek out this kit.



Use your phone. It's portable, won't draw attention and full of sensory inputs! e.g. photos, videos, playlists, sound and exercise apps, alarms and reminders, audiobooks, and maybe a recording of you reassuring yourself.



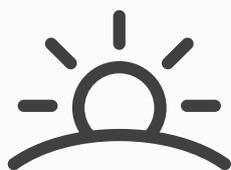
Relax your breathing using simple sensory strategies. e.g. singing or whistling, slowly reciting a poem or story, blowing bubbles, smelling a scent, yoga, playing a wind or brass instrument.



Feel more grounded using activities that provide pressure. e.g. exercise, house and yard work, carrying a heavy backpack, wrapping a shawl across shoulders, applying moisturiser, chewing gum or food.

Caution: Before using weighted items or essential oils consult an occupational therapist or other trained health professional.

4. IDEAS FOR EVERYDAY



In the morning - Use sensory inputs early to energise and lift your mood e.g. citrus soap for showering, eating crunchy foods for breakfast in the sunshine, upbeat music, an exercise routine.



In the evening - Use sensory inputs later in the day to calm and prepare for sleep e.g. limiting blue light from electronic devices, bathing, drinking herbal tea, using lavender hand cream, quiet music.



Keep a daily schedule. Place an 'S' beside times that are challenging e.g. when you normally drink or take drugs, feel lonely or experience pain. Write down sensory inputs to include, and limit, at these times.



Enjoy sensory activities with others. Include some you can do online from home. eg music, games, movies, craft, pets, cooking. This helps all of you to improve your mood.



Create a sensory nook where you can go to feel calm and in charge, with some sensory inputs you prefer. Use your bedroom, a chair on the verandah, the corner of a room or garden bench.



Discuss this with someone you trust. Who can support you to use your sensory strategies? Remember you can call the free national Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline 24 hours a day to speak with a counsellor **1800 250 015**.

WELL DONE! YOU NOW HAVE WAYS TO COPE USING YOUR SENSES.

KEEP THIS TOOL HANDY AND REFER TO IT WHENEVER YOU ARE FEELING STRESSED.