



Northumbria Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Top Tips for Dressing

Sensory Processing

Issued by the Occupational Therapy Sensory Processing Team

People who experience challenges with their sensory processing can often find dressing very difficult. They may struggle to tolerate different clothing materials or find the seams on the inside of clothing, such as socks and underwear, unmanageable.

Here are some helpful strategies to help support with dressing:

Preparing the person for dressing:

- Before getting dressed, have the person engage in some heavy work activities. For example, encourage pushing and pulling heavy objects, such as a laundry basket, back and forth across the floor. This will help to get their bodies ready and focused for dressing.
- Deep-pressure activities can help calm their nervous system before getting dressed. Try other activities such as:
 - A firm massage before getting dressed.
 - A firm scalp massage can be helpful to do before putting on a hat.
 - Bear hugs with firm pressure whilst rocking gently back and forth.
 - If developmentally appropriate, sit facing one another with the soles of your feet touching and holding hands whilst gently pulling and pushing backwards and forwards and singing along to Row, Row, Row Your Boat.

- Try sucking a thick liquid, such as a smoothie or yoghurt, through a straw.
- Allow plenty of time to get ready in the mornings.
 - Pick out clothing ahead of time.
 - Encourage the person to be involved in the selection of clothing options.
- Seasonal wear advice:
 - Transitions between seasons - consider using social stories to help ensure the appropriate clothes are picked for the weather.
- Consider reducing audio and visual distractions.
 - Turn off the TV or radio.
- Some people with sensory processing challenges may struggle with their balance.
 - Encourage the person to sit during dressing so that they can concentrate on getting ready rather than trying to maintain their balance.

Clothing consideration

- Try cutting out labels in clothing or buy clothing without tags.

- Consider flipping undergarments and socks inside out to allow any uncomfortable seams to be worn on the outside of the body.
- Consider purchasing seamless socks/underwear designed to reduce irritation.
- Some synthetic fabrics can be difficult to tolerate try to buy softer fabrics like cotton, fleece, and flannel where possible.
- Some people prefer wearing tighter fitting garments. Consider trying base layers underneath the person's clothes. this can provide a calming influence.
- If tolerating stiff clothing is an issue, consider drying clothes in a tumble-dryer.
- When well-worn clothes are preferred, try washing clothing multiple times to soften the material or use clothes that are second-hand or handed down.
- If the individual is sensitive to smell, consider using a washing powder and a fabric softener that is unscented.

Alternative consideration:

- Please also remember a large percentage of dressing difficulties are related to our tactile system being hypersensitive to touch. Therefore, encouraging people to engage in a range of sensory-based play activities can be very helpful.

Additional Information

Video strategies to support dressing and social stories have been developed by Sheffield People's NHS Foundation Trust Sensory Service.

[Making Sense: Dressing](#)

[Making Sense: Social Stories](#)

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Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS)

You may be able to claim a refund of some travel costs under this scheme. For more information visit the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/healthcosts/pages/travelcosts.aspx

Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, easy read, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.



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the QR code to the left.

Other sources of information

NHS 111

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx

NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

www.nice.org.uk

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Email: northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

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