

Your Sensory Menu

Ways to turn each sense up or down, depending on what the nervous system needs

Not all overwhelm needs less stimulation. Sometimes we need more.

At different times we may be sensory-seeking, sensory-avoiding, numb, flooded, restless or shut down. This sensory menu is a way to notice what each self-state tends to reach for, and to build a personalised regulation toolkit. The grid on the other side is yours to tick and add to.

Which do I need right now?

Hyperaroused ↓ *coming down*

flooded · panicky · jittery · raw · “too much”

Reach for **LESS** — softer, dimmer, slower. Deep pressure still calms here.

Window of tolerance

settled · present · able to think and feel — the zone we head back toward

Hypoaroused ↑ *coming back*

numb · flat · foggy · far-away · shut down

Reach for **MORE** — bigger, brighter, stronger, to come back online.

Hard to tell? Ask whether the system feels **sped up** or **slowed down**:

Sped up → turn it down

heart racing · muscles tight · thoughts going fast · can't sit still · easily startled · an urge to escape or lash out

Slowed down → turn it up

heavy or foggy · distant or far-away · flat · slow to move or speak · sleepy · watching life from behind glass

Deep pressure is the exception to “more means up”: a weighted blanket, a firm hug or being wrapped is a lot of input, yet it usually settles rather than stirs. A very flooded system sometimes needs to be met with strong input first, before it can come down.

* **Intense input** — cold, sour or icy — can bring us back, or can tip into numbing or self-punishment. A gentle check: does this bring me back, or is it numbing or punishing me? If the second, something softer will serve us better.

† **Inner-body attention** — the breath, the heartbeat — steadies many of us, but for some, inner sensation is itself the alarm. If turning inward raises the charge rather than lowering it, it is completely fine to skip these.

Make it a kit

A list is hardest to use in the very moment it's needed — flooded or far-away, thinking is the first thing to go. So it helps to gather a few of the ticked things into something physical: a box, a drawer, a bag by the bed, a tin in the car. Then the choosing is already done, and comfort is to hand rather than something to remember.

What goes in is whatever turned out to be ours — a weighted thing, ear defenders, a familiar-scented jumper, a fidget, a smooth pebble, headphones loaded with brown noise, a note in our own handwriting about what helps. Built on a steady day, it's there for us on a harder one.

Your Sensory Menu — the grid

Tick what tends to help, add your own on the blank lines, and leave the rest.

More *(sensory seeking)*

bigger, brighter, stronger, faster

Less *(sensory soothing)*

softer, dimmer, slower, or none

Sound

hearing

- loud music or bass
- a favourite track on repeat
- white or brown noise, turned up
- _____

- ear defenders or Loop earplugs
- silence
- rain, waves or birdsong
- _____

Sight

visual

- coloured or RGB lights
- visual stimming videos
- watching moving water
- _____

- sunglasses, or dim amber light
- a single candle flame
- eyes closed under a blanket
- _____

Touch

*touch &
temperature*

- cold water or an ice pack*
- a textured or spiky fidget
- barefoot on grass or cool ground
- _____

- a hot water bottle or warm bath
- soft familiar fabric or faux fur
- a smooth worry stone or pebble
- _____

Mouth

taste & jaw

- something spicy, sour or icy*
- crunchy or chewy food
- gum or a fizzy drink
- _____

- something bland and warm
- plain noodles or crackers
- a milky tea or hot chocolate
- _____

Smell

olfactory

- citrus or peppermint
- coffee or eucalyptus
- the smell of rain or soil
- _____

- lavender or vanilla
- a favourite jumper
- a familiar person's scent
- _____

Movement

vestibular

- spinning or swinging
- pacing or bouncing on the spot
- dancing or a fast walk
- _____

- lying flat on the floor
- slow, gentle rocking
- stillness, feet on the ground
- _____

Body & pressure

proprioception

- lift or carry something heavy
- push against a wall
- a tight squeeze or jumping
- _____

- a weighted blanket
- a firm self-hug or tuck-in
- wedged into a corner or doorframe
- _____

Inner body

interoception

- very cold water in the mouth*
- a hand on the heartbeat[†]
- noticing the breath[†]
- _____

- a warm drink
- longer, slower out-breaths[†]
- warmth resting on the belly
- _____

* and † are explained in the notes on the other side.