



Essex Partnership University
NHS Foundation Trust

CHEWING



Chewing

Chewing on non-food objects can be a form of oral sensory seeking. There are three sensory systems involved in oral sensory processing: proprioception, tactile and taste.

Some of the reasons for chewing:

Up to 24 months old, an infant explores their environment by putting objects in their mouths and this helps them to learn about the object. There are a few reasons why a child may continue with oral sensory seeking behaviours past the age of two:

- Developmental delay – the child is still in the sensorimotor stage of development.
- Sensory processing differences – oral sensory seeking behaviours may be used to self-regulate if the child is experiencing too much sensory input from the environment around them.
- A child might chew or suck on objects to calm themselves down if they are experiencing sensory overload. Additionally, some children will seek out proprioceptive sensory input (the sense that influences body awareness) and chewing can provide this sensory input.
- Problems with teeth – the child's teeth may be hurting leading them to chew on objects.
- A medical condition called 'Pica' – craving and eating non-food items.

Strategies for children who are oral sensory seeking

- Trial re-directing your child to other proprioceptive activities, besides chewing, as this will satisfy the same sensory system (see the proprioceptive activities pdf for other ideas).
- If the child is able to eat safely, try giving them crunchy foods (such as raw carrot sticks) and chewy foods (such as dried fruit).
- Toys for children under the age of two will be safe for a child to chew on as they are designed with this in mind.
- Give the child opportunities to enjoy sensory play activities including water play and sensory toys.
- Chewy jewellery – chewelry and chewbuddies.
 - If sensory seeking through chewing clothes; try sewing old clothing together into strips
 - Chewing gum (if suitable for the child)
 - Drinking from a sports bottle and drinking through a straw - especially beneficial to drink a thick drink (like milkshake) through a straw
 - Blowing bubbles
 - Blowing up balloons
 - Eating sour sweets

Other useful resources

Griffin OT (2021) Oral Sensory Seeking – Why is my Child Still Putting Things in Their Mouth? Available at: <https://www.griffinot.com/child-oral-sensory-seeking/>.

Your Kids Table (2021) Everything Oral Sensory: The Total Guide. Available at: <https://yourkidstable.com/oral-sensory-processing/>.