



Sensory processing signs of difficulty - Vestibular (movement)

You will have heard about our 8 sensory systems: hearing, sight, taste, smell, touch, vestibular, proprioception and interoception. You will have also heard about how we process our sensory information; we receive and organise sensation from the environment, then we process that information and make an effective meaningful response.

Now we can consider what it may look and feel like if we have a difference in our vestibular sensory system.

Vestibular sensory system

The vestibular system gives us information about balance and movement. When we move our head the fluid in our inner ear moves, it is this which sends information to our brain about how we are moving. We can tell if we are moving fast, up, down, around!

The faster we move, the more vestibular input we will receive.

Processing vestibular sensory information



You will remember that we used cups to describe how we register sensory information.

When we have a little cup it does not take much information before we notice it - your little cup fills up very quickly! We call this over responsive.



When we have a big cup it takes a lot more information for us to notice - it takes more to fill up our cup. We call this under responsive.

Remember that this is not always a problem, and that our ability to register, process and integrate our sensory information can sometimes feel difficult - when we are tired, unwell or overwhelmed it can feel like our cup fills up quickly.

Signs of Difficulty:

Over responsive 	Under responsive 
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dislikes heights• Becomes dizzy easily• Dislikes busy places• Dislikes having their feet off the floor• Avoids swings, bicycles and playgrounds• May become sick with movement in cars, swings or playground rides• Difficulty maintaining balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty sitting still• Constantly fidgeting• Runs rather than walks• Likes jumping and/or spinning• Moves themselves so they are upside down

Strategies to support

Over responsive 	Under responsive 
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graded exposure to movement• Be aware of head position and the challenge this may bring• Having our feet on the floor, or a firm surface• Having comfortable, stable shoes - make sure they are not loose fitting• Yoga can provide a safe way to enjoy movement• Hand rails may support when moving up or down stairs and steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular opportunities for movement• Something that spins (with caution)• Swings• Space hopper• Bounce pad/trampoline• Gym ball/peanut ball• Stepping stones• Sitting on a move n sit cushion, or place one on the floor underneath your feet• Foot fidget under the desk• Theraband around chair legs to bounce your feet on• You may need to include proprioceptive activities to avoid over stimulation, please refer to our 'Sensory processing - proprioception' information sheet

It is important to monitor signs of vestibular input. If the child or young person has prolonged dizziness, feels sick or goes pale after an activity then stop this and reduce the amount of movement used in the future.

