



# **Sensory-Based Approach in Everyday Life – A Holistic Perspective on Well-Being**

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## **Introduction**

In our modern world, where technological advancements, constant demands, and information overload dominate daily life, it is easy to lose connection with our senses and the present moment. Many people live on autopilot, caught up in future worries or past experiences, which can lead to stress, anxiety, and a sense of meaninglessness. This disconnection between body and mind can have serious consequences for both mental and physical health. Sensory-based approaches, where one actively engages with sensory impressions, can be an effective method to re-establish this connection. By enhancing our awareness of the senses, we can create a more harmonious experience of daily life, reduce stress, and achieve a deeper sense of meaning and well-being.

Research shows that sensory-based techniques not only reduce stress but also foster a deeper connection to the present and improve both mental health and self-perception. Studies have demonstrated that mindfulness, which often incorporates sensory awareness, leads to measurable changes in brain structure, particularly in areas related to emotional regulation and attention (Hölzel et al., 2011). Susan Hart's work on neuroaffective development further emphasizes how connecting

the mind and body through sensory experiences can improve emotional regulation and well-being (Hart, 2006).

This article explores sensory-based approaches from psychological, neuroaffective, evolutionary, and occupational therapy perspectives, presenting how these methods can be integrated into daily life to promote well-being, reduce stress, and strengthen self-perception.

## **What Is a Sensory-Based Approach?**

A sensory-based approach is about consciously directing attention to our sensory impressions—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch—and using them as tools to create presence. Instead of letting thoughts wander to the past or future, we can deliberately focus on our senses, thereby re-establishing contact with the present moment. Sensory awareness helps us break automatic thought and behavior patterns, which are often the root causes of stress, anxiety, and the feeling of disconnection from ourselves.

Sensory awareness can easily be incorporated into daily activities. For example, we can consciously feel the texture of our clothing in the morning, listen to birds singing, or take the time to truly taste our food during lunch. Research has shown that mindfulness practices, which emphasize sensory awareness, can significantly reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009). In Denmark, Jacob Piet's research has shown that mindfulness-based techniques, including sensory attention, are effective for stress reduction and preventing relapse in major depressive disorder (Piet & Hougaard, 2011). When we focus our attention on the senses, we allow ourselves to reconnect the body and mind, leading to mental clarity and physical calm. This is central to mindfulness principles, which encourage attention to the body and sensory experiences without judgment. By engaging the senses in the moment, we create a bridge between our mental and physical existence, and this connection is crucial for balance and well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

## **Neuroaffective Understanding of Sensory-Based Methods**

From a neuroaffective perspective, sensory-based techniques have a direct impact on regulating our nervous system. According to polyvagal theory (Porges, 2007), the nervous system can move between different states, with the parasympathetic system (which controls the body's rest and digest state) playing a key role in promoting relaxation and recovery.

By focusing on sensory impressions such as the sight of a beautiful sunset, the feeling of the wind against the skin, or the sound of gentle waves, we can activate the parasympathetic nervous system and reduce the activation of the fight/flight response associated with stress. Sensory experiences create a sense of safety, inviting the nervous system to shift from an activated state to one of calm. This can be particularly beneficial for individuals experiencing chronic stress or anxiety, where sensory-based techniques can help the body transition from a state of fear to relaxation. Peter Lund Madsen, a Danish brain researcher, also highlights how sensory inputs can calm the brain's stress response and support emotional regulation (Madsen, 2018).

Neuroaffective research also shows that when we consciously engage our senses, the prefrontal cortex of the brain, responsible for emotion regulation, is activated. Studies suggest that sensory-based awareness can help improve emotional regulation and stability by fostering more adaptive responses

to stress and emotions (Schoore, 2012). By directing attention to the senses, we can create a shift in emotional state and achieve inner calm, resulting in greater emotional stability.

## **The Psychological Perspective on a Sensory-Based Approach in Daily Life**

From a psychological perspective, sensory-based techniques serve as a central tool to promote mental health and emotional regulation. In a world dominated by constant demands and overstimulation from technology, many people lose connection to their bodies and the present moment. This often leads to automated thought and behavior patterns that exacerbate feelings of stress and exhaustion.

Sensory-based approaches allow us to interrupt these patterns and instead direct our attention to sensory impressions, creating a break from stressful thoughts. Research shows that this form of sensory awareness can help reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). By shifting attention away from negative thought processes and focusing on bodily sensory experiences, a natural distance is created between the individual and stressful thoughts. This increases the ability to regulate emotions and achieve a more stable state of mind.

Sensory-based techniques have also proven particularly effective in managing stress. Stress activates the body's fight or flight response, leading to physiological reactions such as increased heart rate, faster breathing, and muscle tension. When we consciously engage the senses, we help the body activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes relaxation and recovery (Porges, 2007). This form of self-regulation is essential in treating stress-related disorders and provides a practical method to reduce the physiological and emotional activation associated with stress.

## **Increased Presence and Body Awareness**

Sensory-based techniques promote increased presence and body awareness, which are two central components of modern psychological practice. When we train our attention to sensory impressions, we train ourselves to be present in the moment. This can counter the tendency to live on autopilot, where daily life feels like a series of automated actions without deeper meaning. Presence improves our mental well-being, helping us notice the body's signals and respond more appropriately.

This awareness of the body has also been shown to improve emotional regulation. When we are aware of how our emotions manifest in the body—such as muscle tension with anger or changes in breathing with anxiety—we can more easily regulate our emotional state. Craig (2004) discusses how awareness of bodily sensations is linked to emotional self-regulation, suggesting that individuals who are more attuned to their bodies are better able to manage their emotions. Understanding this connection between mental and physical experiences promotes healthier emotional regulation and reduces the risk of impulsive actions, which often occur in response to stress or strong emotions (Schoore, 2012).

## **Sensory-Based Approach in Therapeutic Settings**

In therapeutic settings, sensory-based techniques are an effective intervention, especially for clients with trauma, anxiety, or depression. Grounding techniques, where the client directs attention to

sensory impressions to anchor themselves in the present, help reduce dissociation and nervous hyperactivation (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006). These techniques are especially useful in trauma work, where the client often experiences a sense of loss of control or safety. By focusing on sensory experiences, the client can achieve a sense of control and stability, which is crucial for therapeutic progress.

By integrating sensory-based techniques into daily life, individuals can achieve greater emotional resilience and increased resistance to stress and psychological discomfort. When the senses are used as an anchor in the present, a stable base is created from which the individual can explore and process emotional challenges in a more controlled and self-regulating way.

It is important to note that these techniques are often referred to by different terms—such as mindfulness, attention training, presence exercises, or simply "checking in." Regardless of the terminology used, they all rely on the same fundamental principles of stress response, nervous system regulation, and the balance between the parasympathetic and sympathetic systems.

## **Occupational Therapy Perspective: Sensory-Based Approach in Daily Activities**

Occupational therapy is based on principles that meaningful activities promote health and well-being. A sensory-based approach supports this by creating presence and awareness in the tasks we perform daily. Many daily activities, such as cooking, bathing, or taking a walk, naturally involve the senses, often without our conscious awareness. When we bring conscious sensory awareness to these activities, we can improve both our performance and our mental calm.

For individuals with stress or sensory challenges, sensory-based techniques can help create balance in everyday life. By focusing attention on, for example, the texture of food, the scent of soap, or the sound of footsteps on a forest path, we can increase presence and reduce feelings of overwhelm. This practice can be particularly beneficial in rehabilitation or stress management, as it helps individuals regain a sense of control over their surroundings and bodily experiences (Wilcock, 2006). Bundgaard & Borg (2009) have also highlighted how sensory integration can improve daily functioning and mental calm in people with sensory or stress-related challenges.

## **Sensory-Based Techniques in Practice**

To help integrate sensory awareness into daily life, here are some simple techniques that can be used as practical tools to enhance well-being:

### **Start Your Day with a Sensory Morning Routine**

- When you wake up, take a moment to feel the bed beneath you. Notice the sensation of the sheets against your skin and listen to the sounds around you—birdsong, wind, or the silence in the room.
- Use your morning routine to engage the senses. When brushing your teeth, focus on the feeling of the brush against your teeth and the taste of the toothpaste.

## **Sensory Breaks During the Workday**

- Take small breaks to tune into your senses, for example, the sound of the keyboard or the feel of the surface of your desk.
- During lunch, pay attention to the taste, smell, and texture of the food. Take time to chew slowly and notice how the food feels in your mouth.

## **Take a Sensory Walk**

- Notice the colors and shapes around you, listen to sounds like the wind or birds singing, and feel the texture of the ground under your feet. This can help break through mental chatter and refocus.

## **Include Sensory-Based Exercises in Your Evening Routine**

- During dinner, create a quiet moment without distractions from electronics. Taste each bite and focus on the flavors.
- End the day with a short mindfulness exercise, where you go through all your senses one by one—what do you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste right now? This can help calm the nervous system and prepare you for a good night's sleep.

## **Variations in Daily Routines**

- Try using your opposite hand to brush your teeth or eat to bring awareness to your movements.

By integrating these sensory-based techniques into everyday life, you can achieve greater presence, reduce stress, and improve your overall well-being.

## **Conclusion**

A sensory-based approach is a powerful tool for re-establishing the connection between body and mind in a busy daily life. By integrating sensory-based techniques into daily activities, we can reduce stress, improve mental well-being, self-perception, and quality of life. From psychological, neuroaffective, evolutionary, and occupational therapy perspectives, sensory-based approaches offer a holistic method to achieve balance and meaning in everyday life. The practical techniques presented in this article can help create greater presence and well-being.

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