



Understanding our senses

Tactile

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"My whole body is ticklish to soft or intense touches especially my toes, feet and neck. Most textures feel prickly against my skin and clothes feel like butter. My clothes must be heavyweight."

Joshua

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Where else we process touch

We have the most amount of tactile receptors in our mouth.

As a baby we develop through a phase of exploring objects through our mouths as it gives me a lot of information really quickly about that object - how hard, soft, warm, cold, big or small etc.

Our tactile receptors also help us to perceive temperature and pain.

We need our tactile sense in order to detect certain food flavours too - like spicy foods.

Tactile information can be really important when understanding and recognising food choices someone may eat especially if we notice someone only eats warm food or cold food!

Our tactile sense is known as being our largest external sense. It's all of the outside of our body but also inside our body to help us recognise temperature - when we drink a hot or cold drink for example.

It's largely linked with our social development and interaction too. When we greet people we use this sense; we might shake their hand, kiss them on the cheek or hug them. All of these involve touch and can be particularly difficult for someone who is sensitive to a particular type of touch.

Ways we experience touch

There are 2 main ways we recognise touch - light touch like a tickle or brushing lightly past a person or object while moving. We receive these messages on our skin and our receptors which process this light sensation are really near the surface meaning we sense them really quickly.

This can mean that light sensations like labels in clothing that lightly touch our skin can feel uncomfortable and seem painful as we are processing a lot of these tactile sensations in a really quick moment of time.

Think about how alerted you become when someone tickles you and how quickly that happens. This is similar to that sensation of the label for some people and can easily overwhelm them.

The other way is touch pressure and these messages are taken from deeper within the skin. When we go for a massage we process this kind of tactile information which can easily be processed, help us to feel where our body is as well as calm us.

Compare the way you feel after having a massage compared to being tickled and the way you respond to these 2 different tactile experiences.

We may recognise people who prefer a particular way of touch. Be wary of this especially light touch. We know that light touch can easily trigger fight and flight responses.

This information is based on our online training 'Understanding our senses' you can find these online via our website shop.

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