

# WHAT IS ORAL SEEKING

Oral seeking is when a child continues to place non-edible objects in their mouth for much longer than other kids do



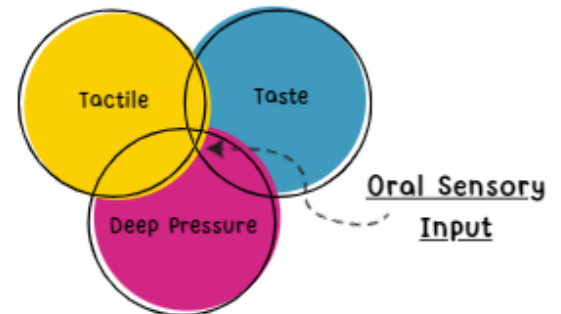
## Why do children mouth items?

Seeking out input into the mouth serves a purpose! It is one of the first ways an infant learns to self-calm.

Infants also use their mouth to explore and learn about the world. The mouth is a very sensitive area of the body and gives the brain very specific information about the properties of objects. Mouthing up to 18-24 months helps their sensory motor development! Mouthing typically subsides after the age of 2. When it persists, there is likely a reason! Unless the dentist has concerns about it impacting their oral health, it is not always a problem.

Oral seeking can also look like overstuffing their mouth with food, making excessive noises with their mouth, or frequent drooling.

## Sensory Benefits



Oral sensory input taps into 3 different sensory systems:

- Tactile: different textures
- Deep pressure: The jaw is one of the strongest set of muscles in the body! Chewing can give a similar sensation to the mouth as a weighted blanket does to the body.
- Taste

All of this sensory information can be incredibly calming to the child's body. Pay attention to the times of day your child is mouthing and if it is related to stressors throughout the day.

## How to Help

### "Flood the system"

Provide as much access to a variety of oral sensory experiences as possible throughout the day. This can help decrease their need to seek it out themselves in ways that might not be safe or healthy.

Try out a vibrating toothbrush, sensory chew necklaces or pencil toppers, z-vibe tool, blowing bubbles, or even imitating making silly faces

Provide more sensory input during mealtimes:

- Incorporate spicy or sour foods
- Give your child a thick smoothie, applesauce, or yogurt and have them drink it through a small or spiral straw
- Camelback water bottle (requires bite and suck)
- Textured spoons
- Different temperatures: soups, popsicles, ice water, etc.

# References

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