

# Could It Be Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)?



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*From the ADHD Experts at*

**ADDITUDE**

*Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD*

# ADDITUDE

## Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—  
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

[ADDitudeMag.com](http://ADDitudeMag.com)

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# Could It Be Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)?

Even outside their daily symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, or impulsivity, some children with ADHD are just considered “difficult.” These children may become anxious or upset when presented with everyday situations that impact their senses — like getting their hair washed, taking medication, encountering loud noises, or going to the dentist.

## SPD and ADHD

What many parents don't realize is that these children may have both ADHD and Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), a neurological condition that makes it hard to process and act on information received from the senses. For some children with SPD, information reaching the senses feels like an assault of competing stimuli. For others, outside stimuli are dulled, as if a shade has been pulled over the environment, muting sights, sounds, and touch. These children crave extra stimulation to feel alive.

Most children with SPD experience both extremes, suffering from sensory overload at some times, seeking stimulation at others. It's not difficult to see how the symptoms — distractibility, the need for intense activity, problems with social interactions — could seem like ADHD.

We now know that many children with ADHD also suffer from SPD. Lucy Jane Miller, Ph.D., director of the Sensory Processing Treatment and Re-

For support groups dealing with SPD, OCD, and other common comorbid conditions, go to [connect.additudemag.com](https://connect.additudemag.com)

search Center, in Denver, Colorado, has found that “more than half of children suspected to have ADHD had SPD or both conditions.”

What about your child? Does your son hate the feeling of being sprayed by water in the shower or gag when brushing his teeth? Does your daughter feel overwhelmed in noisy places or avoid certain foods because of their texture?

As a parent, it is a challenge to deal with your child’s daily upsets. It’s even more difficult for the child, who can’t explain the discomfort, and, in some cases, the horror, of these sensory struggles.

## What to Do

Many professionals recommend getting a diagnosis by a pediatrician or doing occupational therapy—the earlier, the better. Treatment may include a “sensory diet,” in which the child is slowly introduced to activities in a gentle, fun way, in order to get used to a range of sensations. A child who gags on a toothbrush, for example, might practice having his lips massaged gently.

Experts estimate that sensory processing goes awry in as many as 10 percent of all children.

Parents can also try these strategies:

- > **For the hyperactive, sensory-seeking child**, have him help you carry the laundry basket, push the shopping cart, and bring in the grocery bags from the car.
- > **For the tactile-sensitive child**, try finger-painting activities at the kitchen table. Bring shaving cream into the bathtub and let him draw pictures on the walls. Fill a plastic bin with dry beans or rice and hide small toys in it for her to discover.
- > **For children terrified of loud noises**, have a rain dance party. Bring out the pots and have them create their own thunder. This works especially well during a thunderstorm. Ask your child to “beat the thunder first,” or to bang louder than the thunder.
- > **Prepare the foods that a child dislikes in new ways.** If the texture of cooked peas is unbearable, mash them and put them in stews or a meatloaf.
- > **If your child chokes when swallowing a pill**, have her practice with tiny candies. If the sweet gets stuck in her throat, it will melt quickly and reward her with a pleasant flavor.
- > **If your child has a poor sense of space and balance**, try swimming, horseback riding, or jumping on a trampoline.

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- > **For oral sensitivities**, give your child sugarless gum or chewy, healthy treats (make sure to brush teeth afterward or, at least, rinse with water). Have him suck up thick shakes through a straw to stimulate oral movement.
- > **If your child is driven crazy by labels sewn inside her clothing**, buy tops and pants without them. Many well-known brands, like Hanes and Fruit of the Loom, manufacture tagless versions of their popular shirts and underwear.
- > **After baths or showers**, give your child a rubdown, which will calm him down.
- > **Have your child paint himself** with kid-friendly body paint and then scrub it off.

Most children won't outgrow SPD, but the symptoms can be managed with appropriate treatment. Once properly managed, meltdowns should become rarer, and your relationship with your child will improve as you both learn to navigate life with SPD.

For more on living with sensory processing issues, visit the SPD Foundation at [spdfoundation.net](http://spdfoundation.net).

## SCREENER TEST: Could Your Child Have SPD?

Adapted from the [SPD Foundation's Sensory Processing Disorder Checklist](#) designed to screen for the possibility of sensory processing disorder.

- No matter how many times I try to get him to eat certain foods, my child will spit out any food if the texture isn't right.
- My child craves high-stimulation playground equipment, and always wants to swing higher on the swings or spin faster on the merry-go-round.
- My child has difficulty with fine motor tasks, like buttoning her shirt or tying her shoes.
- My child can be too hands-on during non-contact games, doing things like tackling other children during flag football.
- My child prefers tagless clothing, and can become upset if his clothes are itchy or too tight.
- My child gags when she brushes her teeth or tries to swallow a pill.
- My child is terrified of unexpected loud noises, like thunderstorms and car alarms.
- My child is very clumsy for his age, often tripping over his feet or losing his balance unexpectedly.
- My child is very sensitive to strong smells, like laundry detergent or perfume, and can have a meltdown if they persist.
- My child is upset by bright florescent lights or flashing cameras. Taking her picture can cause her to start crying.
- My child can't stand being barefoot in the sand, on grass, or on any unfamiliar texture.

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- My child hates bath time — getting wet, getting her hair washed, or the feeling of soap can cause a tantrum.
  
- My child can't tolerate long lines or big crowds.
  
- My child doesn't like having sticky things on his fingers, making normal childhood activities like finger-painting or playing with Play-Doh out of the question.

If you checked off more than 3 boxes, consider having your child evaluated for SPD; the more you checked, the more likely it is that she has it. If you're concerned, consider bringing it up with your pediatrician at your child's next checkup.

There are three major categories of SPD, each with a few subtypes — making it far from a one-size-fits-all disorder. It's important to remember that these categories are not mutually exclusive; children can have sensory problems across the spectrum, making it difficult for parents or professionals striving to make an accurate diagnosis. Earlier treatment is almost always better, so don't hesitate to discuss SPD with your child's doctor. He or she can refer you to SPD specialists in your area.

For more on the different variations of SPD, check out “How SPD Looks a Lot Like ADHD,” at <http://additu.de/spd-adhd>.

## **ADDitude Special Reports Available Now**

[www.adhdreports.com](http://www.adhdreports.com)

### **9 Conditions Often Diagnosed with ADHD**

**Depression. Bipolar Disorder. Anxiety. OCD. And five more conditions that often show up alongside attention deficit.**

About 80 percent of individuals with ADHD are diagnosed with at least one other psychiatric condition at some time in their lives. This in-depth special report looks at the nine most common, outlining symptoms, treatment strategies, and differentiating features of each. Plus, strategies for living well with any mental health condition.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/related>

### **ADHD 101**

**A complete overview of ADHD, outlining every step from diagnosis to treatment—all the way to living successfully with attention deficit.**

From the moment you suspect ADHD in yourself or your child, you have hundreds of questions. Which doctors can evaluate symptoms? What medication side effects should you be prepared for? Can diet help? This comprehensive eBook has over 100 pages of expert advice, personal stories, and more to help you become an ADHD expert.

>> Learn More About This Special Report: <http://additu.de/adhd-101>

### **A Parent's Guide to ADHD, Diet, and Nutrition**

**The foods, vitamins, minerals, supplements, and herbs that can help your child manage symptoms.**

What is a good ADHD diet? Is sugar the enemy? What about gluten? Dairy? In this comprehensive special report, we detail the connection between the food your child eats and the severity of his hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity, covering topics from artificial dyes and flavors to the right amount of protein.

>> Learn more about this special report: <http://additu.de/nutrition>

**To purchase these or other ADDitude Special Reports, go to [www.adhdreports.com](http://www.adhdreports.com)**

## **More ADDitude Downloadable Booklets**

### **It's Not ADHD: 3 Common Diagnosis Mistakes.**

Doctors are sometimes too quick to diagnose ADHD. Read up on common misdiagnoses.

### **Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?**

Use this self-test to find out if your child's problems at school may be due to LD.

### **Is It Depression?**

Depression is a serious mood disorder, but it's not always easy to recognize.

### **Is It Bipolar Disorder or ADHD?**

Symptoms of bipolar disorder and ADHD often overlap.

### **Is It Adult ADHD?**

Habitually disorganized? Always running late? It could be ADHD.

### **Celebrities Living with ADHD**

Famous people on how they found success with attention deficit.

### **Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:**

[http://additu.de/  
freeloads](http://additu.de/freeloads)

## FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

### Sensory Processing Disorder in Kids

>> <http://additu.de/spd>

Is your child with ADHD extra sensitive when it comes to tastes, sounds, smells, or even how a certain fabric feels on their skin? It could be Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). Carol Kranowitz, M.A., explains how parents can identify, treat, and help their children manage SPD.

### The Truth About Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

>> <http://additu.de/ocd-webinar>

There are lots of misconceptions surrounding OCD and ADHD, especially when the conditions coexist. In this webinar, host Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D., sets the record straight about this potentially debilitating condition. Learn the truth about obsessive-compulsive disorder, so you (or your child) can get the right diagnosis and receive the proper treatment.

### What to Treat First?

>> <http://additu.de/6k>

ADHD is frequently accompanied by one or more comorbid conditions, such as depression, anxiety, learning disabilities, or ODD. Dr. Larry B. Silver explains what to look for, and how to treat dual diagnoses — as well as how dealing with comorbidities can affect life for an ADHD child or adult.

### Raising a Child with Special Needs

>> <http://additu.de/special-needs>

The self-proclaimed “imperfect” mother-daughter duo Gina and Katie Gallagher host an extra special audio and slide presentation about raising children with special needs. Not only will you hear from the mom who’s been there, done that, and written the book on special needs, but you’ll also hear, first-hand, what it’s like to grow up, and succeed, with special needs.

### Emotions in ADHD Teens

>> <http://additu.de/teens>

Dealing with an emotionally volatile teen? It could be her ADHD. Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D., offers strategies for maintaining emotional control, as well as advice for teaching teens to find emotional balance.

## FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, plus strategies for school, parenting, and living better with ADHD: <http://additu.de/email>

### Adult ADHD and LD (weekly)

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

### Parenting ADHD and LD Children (weekly)

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

### ADHD and LD at School (bimonthly; weekly from August through October)

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more.

### Treating ADHD (weekly)

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.