

The Vestibular Sense

The vestibular sense is located in our inner ears. It regulates our sense of balance and body control. It also contributes to our skills in gross and fine motor interaction, from our arms to our legs to fingers and toes.

When it isn't working typically, people with autism can be seriously affected. It can impede their understanding of what is happening to them and the world around them.

Under responsive (seeker)

A need to seek out experiences to boost body movement. Without this additional movement, the balance we all feel comfortable with may not be achievable.

This may appear as hyperactivity, a desire to be on the move all the time, to eagerly accept experiences like fairground rides, swings, rough and tumble or gymnastics.

All of these activities will stimulate the sense.

Over responsive (avoider)

A debilitating response to motion (typically in the form of travel sickness).

This can be particularly difficult to people with autism to bear if they don't know what is causing the nausea and can't express their feelings.

Additionally, time to process these sensations may vary depending on the person so it may be even more difficult to determine the cause of the anxiety.

Repetitive actions like mild rocking or swinging can help calm an over-stimulated vestibular system by gently controlling the movement. This can also build tolerance.