

# Sensory Guide for Pharmacy

Community pharmacies may consider using a Sensory Guide to highlight the sensory experience details including touch, taste, sound, sight and smell comparing busy times versus quiet hour.

A clear sensory guide in a community pharmacy helps people quickly understand how an environment might feel before and during their visit. This can reduce uncertainty, anxiety and sensory overload while supporting safe, more independent medicines use. A well designed guide can outline how each of the five senses is likely to be experienced on a 1-5 rating scale (with 5 being the highest), the expected level of touch (crowding, bumping, handling items), taste (samples, and flavoured medicines), sound (music, beeping devices, background chatter), sight (brightness, visual clutter), and smell (fragrances, perfumes and antiseptics/cleaning).

Presenting this information in a simple, consistent format allows neurodivergent and sensory sensitive people to plan ahead, choose quieter times, and request adjustments, mirroring how sensory maps and rating systems are increasingly used in parks, playgrounds, tourist attractions, airports and major venues eg MCG, to create a more predictable and inclusive environment for all visitors.

<b>BUSY PERIOD</b>	<b>QUIET HOUR</b>
<b>TOUCH</b>	
<p><b>Staff and Customers:</b> Frequent physical interactions, such as handing over prescriptions, bags, and medications, cause a lot of tactile stimulation.</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> Surfaces may feel more crowded with paperwork, medicine bottles, and boxes, creating a sensation of cramped, bustling space.</p> <p><b>Temperature:</b> The air may feel warmer due to more bodies in the space, creating a sensation of warmth from body heat, and potentially even a feeling of urgency.</p>	<p><b>Staff and Customers:</b> Less physical interaction, which makes the act of handing over medication or prescriptions feel more deliberate and calm.</p> <p><b>Environment:</b> The tactile sensation of the environment can feel more open, with more space to move around and less clutter.</p> <p><b>Temperature:</b> The temperature is often more neutral, as fewer people generate body heat, leading to a more comfortable and cooler feel in the air.</p>






<b>TASTE</b>	
<p><b>Pharmacist or Customer Taste:</b> This is a rare sense engaged in the pharmacy, but it could come into play when discussing medication with patients</p> <p><b>Taste in the Air:</b> The presence of certain medications or perfumes may impart subtle flavours in the air.</p>	<p><b>Pharmacist or Customer Taste:</b> Less rush means customers have more time to ask questions or discuss their medication. e.g., “This one’s very bitter, so try taking it with juice”</p> <p><b>Taste in the Air:</b> Any noticeable taste from medicinal smells or products could feel more pronounced in the stillness of the quiet environment.</p>
<b>SOUND</b>	
<p><b>Background Noise:</b> The sounds of the busy pharmacy are dominated by a continuous hum—voices, the click of cash registers, the whirr of pharmacy equipment, and the rustling of paper.</p> <p><b>Conversations:</b> The pharmacy’s soundscape is often punctuated by overlapping conversations: patients discussing prescriptions with pharmacists, the staff answering calls, and customers asking questions.</p> <p><b>Urgency:</b> In a busy setting, the overall tone of voices may be quicker, giving a sense of urgency or energy.</p>	<p><b>Background Noise:</b> The sound of a quiet pharmacy is much more subdued. The hum of the air conditioning or the sound of the pharmacist typing may be the most dominant noises.</p> <p><b>Conversations:</b> Conversations are more spaced out and measured. A quieter, more soothing tone prevails when speaking with customers, who may feel less rushed.</p> <p><b>Focus:</b> The overall sound is peaceful, promoting focused, calm communication with patients.</p>
<b>SIGHT</b>	
<p><b>Visual Clutter:</b> Shelves and counters may appear crowded, with medications, forms, and signs covering surfaces. The space may feel visually</p>	<p><b>Orderliness:</b> The visual environment feels calmer and less cluttered. There’s less rush,</p>

<p>cluttered due to the number of customers and products.</p> <p><b>Movement:</b> The most noticeable visual aspect of a busy pharmacy is the constant movement—staff rushing between workstations, customers walking through the aisles, and constant interaction with technology.</p> <p><b>Colours:</b> Bright lights and vivid signage might create a stimulating visual environment.</p>	<p>and the pharmacy may have a more organized, serene appearance.</p> <p><b>Movement:</b> The movement of people is slower and more intentional. Staff and customers are typically engaged in deliberate activities, with a focus on detail.</p> <p><b>Colours:</b> The lighting is softer, and the focus is more on the natural colours of the products, with the environment feeling more soothing to the eye.</p>
<p><b>SMELL</b></p>	
<p><b>Aromatic Notes:</b> The air in a busy pharmacy can be filled with a mix of scents—medicinal smells from various products, fragrances and hand sanitisers.</p> <p><b>Overpowering:</b> These smells may be less noticeable individually, as they are drowned out by the overall activity, but the density of smells can create a unique but slightly overwhelming olfactory experience.</p>	<p><b>Aromatic Notes:</b> In a quieter space, the smells become more noticeable. You may detect the sharpness of antiseptic wipes, the comforting sweetness of some syrups, or herbal notes from products like teas or oils.</p> <p><b>Subtlety:</b> Because the environment is calm, these scents may be more distinct, allowing customers and staff to distinguish individual odours rather than a muddled mix.</p>

This information can then be displayed in the form of a graphic like the following example. This graphic is an easy-to-read guide depicting both quiet time and busy weekday periods and the associated sensory levels that can be expected.

# SENSORY GUIDE

Weekdays between 8.30am - 10am

TOUCH	TASTE	SOUND	SIGHT	SMELL
				
5	1	4	3	3

During quiet hour 1pm - 2pm Tuesdays






TOUCH	TASTE	SOUND	SIGHT	SMELL
				
3	1	2	1	1

Image: Sensory guide - example for Community Pharmacy to display

Credit: The Spectrum Pharmacist