

## Sensory Wellness

The sensory system consists of eight senses including sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, proprioception, vestibular and interoception. The only way humans can receive information from the environment is through the sensory system (sensation).

Each of the senses is fully developed at the time of birth but it is through childhood development that the sensory system integrates and the senses begin working together efficiently. When the sensory system has fully developed, the integration of the senses is needed in order to:

- Concentrate
- Organize
- Have abstract thought and reasoning
- Have confidence and self-esteem
- Have self-control and self-regulation

Without sufficient sensory integration (inhibition or filtering by the brain), sensory impulses would spread like wildfire throughout the nervous system and nothing would ever be accomplished - the person would simply be overwhelmed.

The ability to regulate or modulate the sensory system continues to develop throughout life in order to deal with sensory stimulation in the environment and within our bodies. We learn, at different stages, how to increase or decrease the amount of stimulation we pay attention to and adjust the “volume” up or down.

Mindfulness involves setting the intention to bring awareness to the present moment without judgement. It can be practiced as a formal meditation in a seated position, lying down or walking. Mindfulness can also be practiced informally by bringing awareness to the senses during any experience such as drinking coffee, washing our hands or listening to music. Practicing mindfulness teaches us to move out of automatic pilot and into our sensory experience. As we build awareness and begin to notice more subtle shifts in our system, we gain the opportunity to consciously choose how to respond to whatever presents itself, instead of reacting to it.

Sensory wellness involves integrating the practice of mindfulness with sensory regulation in order to enhance health and well-being. Mindfulness strengthens awareness to help individuals identify their sensory likes and dislikes that assist or interfere with everyday life and productivity. Sensory wellness includes the ability to

consciously and cognitively, as well as automatically, regulate emotions including fear and relaxation, alertness and attention. It includes identifying grounding, calming and alerting tools that can be used to regulate the sensory system in order to nurture growth and deepen self-trust.

Join us on March 18th from 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm at the Hillside Seniors Health Centre to learn how to tap into your individual sensory system in order to promote overall health and wellness.

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