**Autism and Supertaste – Tasty? Or Nasty?**

May 8, 2015 by [Stella Waterhouse](file:///F%3A%5C1_ALL-FILES_082714%5C1_LEO%5C1_WEB_Projects%5C1_A_Project_DFYS-WORK%5C1_PROJECTS-Clients%5C45_Stella-Waterhouse%5CStella%5Cwww.autismdailynewscast.com%5Cauthor%5Cstellawaterhouse%5Cindex.html)

Has your child always been a picky eater?  Does he stick to a few bland foods?  Or push strong foods away – or even gag on them?  Or detest bubbly drinks – and even some sweets?   If so there is a good chance that he is ‘hyper’sensitive; perceiving tastes and flavors more intensely than many other people.

In this complex area there is also an interplay with two other senses.  Thus whilst sensations such as sweet, sour, bitter, salty and umami (the fifth taste) are all related to taste, the other attributes of food, like its texture, feeling in your mouth and  temperature are related to touch whilst its detailed flavor is related to smell.

The child with ‘supertaste’ experiences tastes – and usually smells too – as being very strong.  Thus sugar is sweeter, salt saltier, the fat in milk is creamier and bitterness is appalling. Strangely though, despite such sensitivity, such children often can’t get enough salt – perhaps because it helps block out the dreaded bitterness?   This child finds the sensation of bubbly drinks more pronounced – and can also distinguish individual flavors in a mixture very well: a skill some top chefs seem to share.

However there can be a real downside to this as an article entitled *‘Are you a ‘supertaster’?* in *The Guardian* tells us.  Thus  one woman talks of tasting the rubber from the utensils her mother used in cooking whilst the author, Amy Fleming,  tells us that she can often taste ‘chopping-board’ or even ‘washing-up liquid’ in food.

Add to that the fact that certain textures can also cause discomfort and you find that some children will only eat smooth foods like mashed potatoes or ice-cream, or will only tolerate putting certain things in their mouths – whether that be a particular mug/spoon or a favored toothbrush. Hardly surprising then that some people (both with and without ASD) become such fussy eaters.

Perhaps though your child loves food and delights in eating things that have strong flavors?  Or eats anything and everything whether edible or not – so that nothing is safe whether it be soil, grass or even play-dough (a condition known as pica which may sometimes be related to a lack of vitamins and minerals.)

This is the child who is ‘hypo’ (under-sensitive) so that tastes, smells and flavors never seem very strong to him and he is unable to detect or differentiate between different tasting substances.  Unfortunately this child often puts himself at risk because he eats indiscriminately.

Finally there is the child who falls into the category of ‘white noise’ as identified by the late Dr Delacato. The child he believed had a constant taste in his mouth; who sucked his tongue or chewed the inside of his mouth. One who even regurgitated food so that he could re-chew, re-taste and re-swallow it. A child who was generally apathetic about food, allowing others to feed him but rarely doing so himself. All too often such children also have thickened tongues due to the constant sucking.

\*\*\*

***Top Tips***

***General:***

* Be relaxed and don’t make meals into a battleground. Look at his food intake over a week rather than on a daily basis.
* Offer favorite foods alongside a small portion of a new food and just see what happens – but don’t push it.
* If texture is a problem try pureeing food.

If using supplements:

* Mix tiny amounts of supplements with a food he likes and gradually increase the amount.
* Make ice pops with liquid vitamins.
* Use calcium and magnesium in cooking and baking.

***For the hyper child:***

* Use bland foods.
* Give small portions.
* Avoid carbonated drinks.
* Mix tiny amounts of any new food/drink into something you know he likes and then increase the amount of the new food very slowly.

***For the hypo child you need to ensure that:***

* He cannot access certain areas like the kitchen/bathroom by himself.
* All cleaning materials, mouthwash, medicines etc are kept under lock and key.
* He eats a balanced diet.

***The child who has a constant taste in his mouth:***

* Should be discouraged from regurgitation.
* Will benefit from ‘exercising’ his tongue – see www.autismdecoded.com