



## Sensory Overload and Deprivation <sup>[1]</sup>

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Too much or too little sensory experience is harmful to the body. Overstimulation from the environment may result to a condition called sensory overload, while understimulation is referred to as sensory deprivation.

### Sensory Overload

The sense experiences of the body are crucial for human survival, growth and development. However, sensory overload or overstimulation of the body from physical stimuli in the environment may cause mild to severe effects. Elements such as noise, crowding, mass media, and urbanization are just some of the factors that may contribute to sensory overload.

It was in early 1990s that Georg Simmel, a sociologist, contributed to the early studies related to sensory overload. He wrote about urbanization as a major element that overstimulates the sensory organs as well as the brain.

In a study conducted by Japanese researchers of Tohoku University, subjects who were exposed to intense auditory and visual stimuli showed changes in their mood such as sadness, anxiety and aggression. This study led to further research on sensory overload. Later studies concluded that symptoms of sensory overload include irritability, withdrawal, overexcitation, bright light hypersensitivity (cover eyes when there are bright lights), inability to complete tasks, muscle tension, restlessness, fidgeting, fatigue, sleeplessness and angry outbursts. Because of these, some researchers try to find links between sensory overload and generalized anxiety disorder or GAD.

Sensory overload may be caused by loud noises or multiple sources of sound, bright lights or fast TV scenes and changes in scenes, spicy foods or strong odors, and strong or prolonged tactile stimulations.

One of the most effective ways to reduce overstimulation and treat sensory overload <sup>[3]</sup>is occupational therapy. This starts from identifying the triggering elements of sensory overload, and then removing oneself from these factors gradually, not abruptly. Avoidance and setting limits are two important ways in the prevention of sensory overload.

### Sensory Deprivation

Also known as perceptual isolation, sensory deprivation is the understimulation of sensory

organs or systems due to the reduction or removal of physical stimuli. Short-term sensory deprivation has been used in the medical world as a means of relaxation. Sensory deprivation has been useful in the interrogation of prisoners that are covered by obligations of the international treaty. These include restricted environmental stimulation therapy (REST), which is divided into two different methods: flotation REST and chamber REST.

In contrast, forced or extended periods of sensory deprivation may result to depression, hallucinations, bizarre thoughts and anxiety. Gradual increase in activities of daily living, as guided by a psychologist or a professional life coach, has been effective in dealing with sensory deprivation.

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[3] <http://www.autismkey.com/coping-with-sensory-overload/>