



**South London
and Maudsley**
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PEACE 

Pathway for Eating disorders and Autism
developed from Clinical Experience

Sensory workshops developed by the PEACE pathway

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Research studies

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Sensory wellbeing workshops for inpatient and day-care patients with anorexia nervosa

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Summary

Background The wellbeing of patients with eating disorders is one of the priorities in the “bigger picture” of treatment for eating disorders. Sensory soothing strategies for sensory sensitivities are supportive tools which could be useful in day-care and inpatient clinical programmes.

Methods Evaluation of multiple separate sensory wellbeing workshops consisting of psychoeducation and experiential components delivered in inpatient and intensive day-care services was performed. Participants’ self-report questionnaires were evaluated pre- and post-workshop. Additionally, patients’ comments

use some of the skills and strategies they learned in the workshop.

Conclusion This pilot work on sensory wellbeing workshops with a protocol-based format was feasible and beneficial for the patient group. Preliminary evidence suggests that delivery of similar workshops could be sensible in addition to treatment as usual in inpatient and day-care programmes.

Keywords Eating disorders · Autistic spectrum condition · Anorexia nervosa · Sensory sensitivity · Wellbeing

Li et al. *Journal of Eating Disorders* (2023) 11:117
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-023-00834-8>

Journal of Eating Disorders

RESEARCH

Open Access



In-person and online sensory wellbeing workshop for eating disorders: updated case series

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Abstract

Background A one-off sensory wellbeing workshop has been developed to help patients with eating disorders (ED) manage sensory sensitivities. The aim of this study was to evaluate and compare the outcomes of the workshop in online versus face-to-face (F2F) formats among a sample of patients with ED.

Methods Cumulative link models were applied to the outcome measures (awareness of sensory wellbeing, awareness of strategies to enhance sensory wellbeing, and confidence in managing sensory wellbeing) to test the differences between online and F2F workshops. Participants’ ratings of usefulness of the workshop were also compared between online and F2F workshops.

Results A total of 14 workshops (4 online and 10 F2F) were run from 2020 to 2023. All participants reported significant and substantial improvements in all outcome measures. There was no significant difference in outcomes between online and F2F workshops. The majority of patients rated the workshops as useful.

Conclusions Both online and face-to-face formats of the sensory workshop led to improvement in sensory wellbeing management for patients with ED. Future studies are warranted to test the impact of the workshop on ED treatment outcomes.

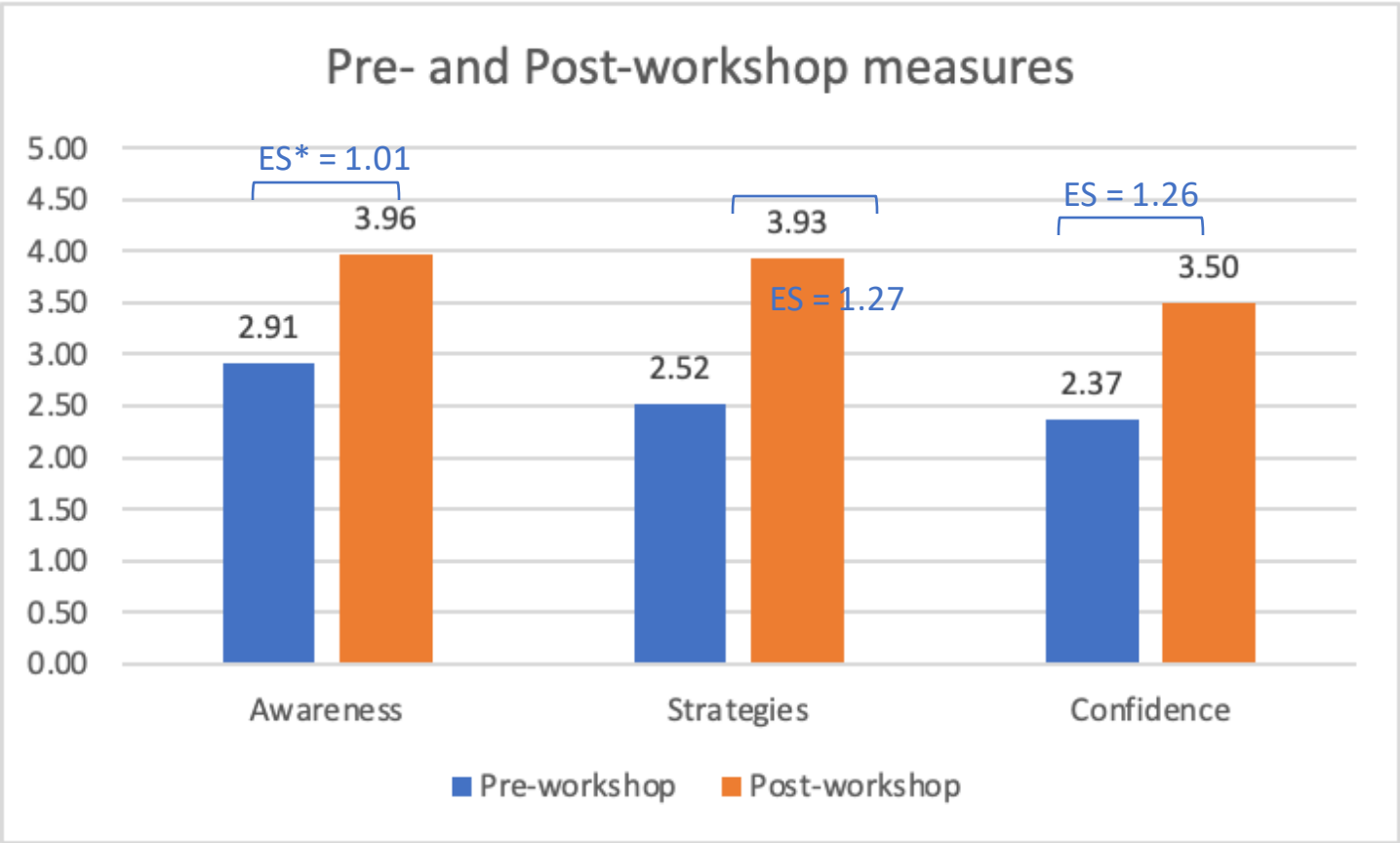
Plain English summary

People with eating disorders often have sensory issues, which can include being too sensitive to some senses (hearing, smell or taste, for example) or not sensitive enough. Explaining how the sensory system works and developing helpful strategies to manage sensory difficulties could be beneficial in the process of therapy. To try and support this, clinicians and researchers designed a sensory wellbeing workshop to help people become more aware of their sensory wellbeing and teach them strategies to manage their sensory wellbeing. The workshop can be delivered online or face-to-face. This study examined the feedback for online and face-to-face workshops. We found that both formats were helpful for people with eating disorders. We also discuss possible ways to develop and test the workshop further in order to better support patients with sensory difficulties.

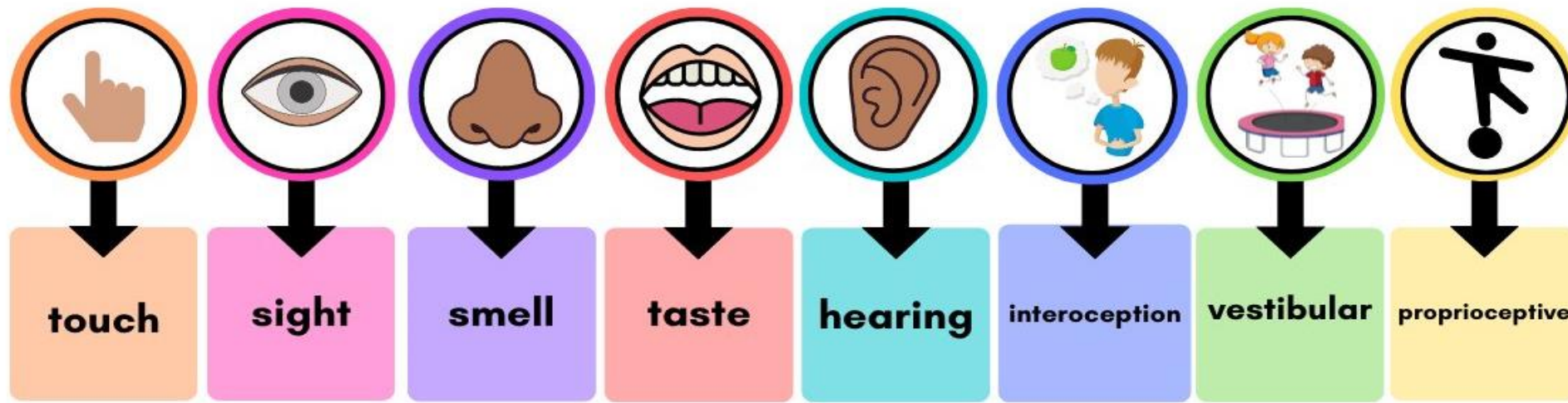
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Our published data and ongoing evaluation shows that:



*Cohen's *d* used for effect sizes; **0.2 = Small effect size. 0.5 = Medium effect size. 0.8 = Large effect size**



Group protocol

- Two facilitators
- Duration: an hour to 1hr 30 minutes
- Pre and post group outcome measures
 - Awareness of sensory wellbeing
 - Awareness of strategies to enhance their sensory wellbeing
 - Confidence in managing their sensory wellbeing
- Psychoeducation on:
 - The sensory system
 - Sensory soothing strategies

Group protocol - DIY

Create your own sensory box!

- A box of your favorite sensory items

Sensory jars filled with glitter

- Make your own: jar, glitter, glue, and water

Voice recordings

- Recording family members/friends/yourself saying things you know you like to hear when you are feeling anxious or upset

Creating an essential oil spray

- Essential oils are mixed with water in a spray bottle for a calming mix



Feedback from recent workshops



"Fun, light atmosphere, good variety of things to do."



"I enjoyed experimenting with different senses and learning more about how to soothe them."



"I liked the practical elements of the workshop and found talking about senses quite useful as I am hypersensitive."



"I would have liked longer/more sessions to get more information about the senses."

Our (facilitators) reflections

Challenges

- Lack of engagement due to severity of the illness
- Patients have difficulties paying attention
- Relatively costly to run
- Some patients might find sensory input overstimulating (smells)

Our (facilitators) reflections

Positives

- Environment matters – feedback that patients enjoyed being off the ward
- Therapeutic alliance – sensory workshop as an icebreaker for other groups on the ward (fun group) and helped in the interactions between us and the patients in general
- Creative workshop
- Provides tools patients can use to self sooth outside of the workshop
- Flexibility with the protocol
- Psychoeducation about the sensory system

Resources you might find helpful



www.peacepathway.org

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Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World

by Laura James

Spectrum Women: Walking to the Beat of Autism

by Barb Cook and Dr Michelle Garnett

Chapter 11- Our Sensory Worlds p.148-161

Watch:

[Temple Grandin talks about the sensory system](#)

[Amy Laurent](#)

TED talk: Examples of how sensory experiences may contribute to stress and dysregulation



Touch

What your skin feels (texture, tightness, pressure, temperature, etc.) from either something touching you or you touching an object.



Sound

The sound waves that your ears register, including different pitches and frequencies.



Taste

The signals that your taste buds receive in your mouth (sweet, salty, sour, bitter, umami).



Vestibular

What constitutes your sense of balance and spatial orientation or coordination of your head and body.



Vision

The colors and depth perception signals that your eyes receive from your surroundings.



Proprioception

The system that focuses on the body's muscle and joint movements.



Smell

The scents and aromas that your nose picks up from the objects around you.



Interoception

What gives you signals of your internal organs, such as hunger, pain, urination, etc.

Winnie Dunn

living *Sensationally*

Understanding Your Senses



Further reading and resources

- ❑ Kinnaird, E., Dandil, Y., Li, Z., Smith, K., Pimblett, C., Agbalaya, R., Stewart, C., & Tchanturia, K. (2020). Pragmatic Sensory Screening in Anorexia Nervosa and Associations with Autistic Traits. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 9(1182)
- ❑ Kinnaird, E., Stewart, C., & Tchanturia, K. (2020), Interoception in Anorexia Nervosa: Exploring Associations with Alexithymia and Autistic Traits. *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11(64)
- ❑ Tchanturia, K., Baillie, C., Biggs, C., Carr, A., Harrison, A., Li, Z., McFie, C., Oyeleye, O., & Toloza, C. (2021). Sensory wellbeing workshops for inpatient and day-care patients with anorexia nervosa. *Neuropsychiatry*, 36, 51-59.
- ❑ Tchanturia, K. (Ed.). (2021). *Supporting autistic people with eating disorders: A guide to adapting treatment and supporting recovery*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- ❑ PEACE pathway website: <https://www.peacepathway.org/>
 - ❑ Sensory Communication Passport: <https://www.peacepathway.org/download/35>
 - ❑ Sensory Wellbeing Booklet: <https://www.peacepathway.org/download/8>
- ❑ Book: [Living Sentionally by Winnie Dunn](#)
- ❑ TED talk: [Virginia Spielmann TED talk: Your sensory health matters. Here's why](#)