

# Sensory Issues Activity Pack

Physiotherapy &  
Occupational Therapy

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.



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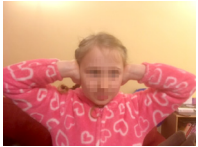
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# Children's Community Occupational Therapy

## Sensory Issues Activity Pack - Identifying the Problem

This booklet has been designed to provide practical ideas and activities to help support your child to develop their ability to process sensory information. Some people are more over sensitive or under sensitive to sensory inputs – which means they may avoid certain activities or seek out more of a certain input. This can make participation in certain activities more challenging. Advice enclosed below is to support the ongoing development of these skills and requires perseverance and consistency.

Problem	Possible Causes	Things to Try
<p><b>Difficulty with hair washing / hair brushing / hair cutting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over sensitivity to touch</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proprioceptive (Joint and muscle feedback) input before activity</li> <li>Allow child control of input, where able</li> <li>Calm environment before and during</li> <li>Water play / play with hair brushes at alternative times</li> <li>Trial vibrating hair brush</li> <li>Put a mirror in front of the child so they can see</li> <li>Gentle countdown before input so the child can anticipate it coming</li> <li><b>Refer to 'Proprioceptive Activities for Children' (p9).</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Difficulty with tooth brushing</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over sensitivity to touch</li> <li>Over sensitivity to taste.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proprioceptive input before activity</li> <li>Oral motor input before tooth brushing (e.g., use of chewy tube / chewy necklace or oral motor game – always supervise)</li> <li>Allow child control of input, where able</li> <li>Calm environment before and during</li> <li>Trial a mild flavour toothpaste</li> <li><b>Refer to 'Proprioceptive Activities for Children' (p9)</b></li> <li><b>Refer to 'Oral Motor Activities and Chewy Tubes' (p11).</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Doesn't like messy hands.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over sensitivity to touch.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gentle introduction – do not force</li> <li>Offer opportunities to explore different textures regularly</li> <li><b>Refer to 'Sensory Issues' (p6).</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Doesn't tolerate wearing clothing or doesn't like certain fabrics</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over sensitivity to touch.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Firm pressure massage to arms and legs can help to desensitize skin</li> <li>Allow choice over clothing</li> <li>Tight fitting clothing sometimes feels better as it doesn't move against skin (e.g., leggings)</li> <li><b>Refer to 'Sensory Issues' (p6).</b></li> </ul>

<b>Fussy eating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over sensitivity to touch</li> <li>• Over sensitivity to taste</li> <li>• Over sensitivity to smell</li> <li>• Difficulty with oral – motor control.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Sensory Feeding Advice’ (p10)</b></li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Oral Motor and Chewy Tubes’ (p11).</b></li> </ul>
<b>Doesn’t like loud noises</b>  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over sensitivity to sound</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ear defenders can be used but it is important to expose children to sound also to build tolerance. – i.e. do not use ear defenders all the time</li> <li>• Allow control where possible</li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Noise Sensitivity’ (p12).</b></li> </ul>
<b>Fearful of crowds / busy places</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over sensitivity to sound</li> <li>• Over sensitivity to visual input.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior warning</li> <li>• Allow use of a hood to create feeling of safety</li> <li>• Earphones with music in can be tried</li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Noise Sensitivity’ (p12).</b></li> </ul>
<b>Always on the go</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking additional sensory input through movement and joint and muscles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular opportunity for movement that is rhythmical and organised</li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Sensory Issues’ (p6)</b></li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Sensory Snack Advice’ (p7 - 8)</b></li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Proprioceptive Activities for Children’ (p9).</b></li> </ul>
<b>Chews non-food objects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking additional oral – motor feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Oral – Motor Activities and Chewy Tubes’ (p11).</b></li> </ul>
<b>Walking on tip toes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over sensitivity to touch</li> <li>• Seeking additional feedback through joints and muscles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firm pressure to feet, e.g. massage</li> <li>• Encourage marching or stamping</li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Proprioceptive Activities for Children’ (p9)</b></li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Sensory Snack Advice’ (p7 - 8).</b></li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty with attention and concentration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over sensitivity to noise</li> <li>• Over sensitivity to visual input</li> <li>• Seeking additional movement input and feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular movement breaks throughout the day</li> <li>• Visual timer such as a sand timer</li> <li>• Introduce a visual timetable</li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Sensory Issues’ (p6)</b></li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Proprioceptive Activities for Children’ (p9)</b></li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Sensory Snack Advice’ (p7 - 8)</b></li> </ul>
<b>Difficulty with sleep</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty with sensory regulation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular calming sensory activities throughout the day</li> <li>• Calming bedtime routine</li> <li>• Reduce access to electronics 1 hour before bed</li> <li>• Massage at bed time</li> <li>• <b>Refer to ‘Proprioceptive Activities for Children’ (p9).</b></li> </ul>

<p><b>Difficulty with toileting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty processing internal senses (interoception).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure feet are supported, an insert is in situ if they are little (family toilet seats available online)</li> <li>• Consistency is key with toilet training</li> <li>• <b>Refer to 'Interoception' (p14).</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Self – injurious behaviours (such as head banging / meltdowns)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty with sensory / emotional regulation</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Behaviour.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small space at home (such as den or tent, with cushions or low lighting)</li> <li>• Proprioceptive activities regularly throughout the day</li> <li>• Be proactive in responding to your child's body language or behaviour that tells you they may be becoming overwhelmed and reduce sensory inputs where able (e.g., quiet environment, slow movement)</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate behavioural strategies are also in place</li> <li>• <b>Refer to 'Fun Yoga Poses' (p15)</b></li> <li>• <b>Refer to 'After School Meltdown' (p13).</b></li> </ul>



## Sensory Snack Advice

We all need to be active throughout our lives but the most important time is during childhood where activity is central to developing our ability to learn and pay attention. A good 'Sensory Diet' of activity means doing activities which provide the sensory input we need to stay focused and organized throughout the day. Everyone has a unique set of sensory needs. Generally, our nervous system is rather like a car engine. If it is running too fast we need more calming input. If our engine is rather sluggish we need activity to wake us up.

We all have to cope with a lot of sensory input throughout the day. We see, hear, smell, taste, touch and move all the time. It can become a bit like a traffic jam of information to cope with and for some of us, ordinary every day sensory input can become overwhelming. Choosing the right activities to occupy us through the day can help the traffic to flow better.

As parents you know your child best and may find that at times your child is overly sensitive or they try to avoid sensory inputs. At others times they may not notice sensory inputs or seek more sensory input than you would expect them to need.

The key to managing and improving sensory function is learning to read your child's nervous system. Prevention is better than cure so it is important for your child to have a good 'Sensory Diet' of activity throughout the day to keep their engine running smoothly. Here are some ideas which can be repeated many times a day to help your child remain calm and focused. Regular 'Sensory Snacks' can help you to keep your child's nervous system running more smoothly and coping with the traffic!

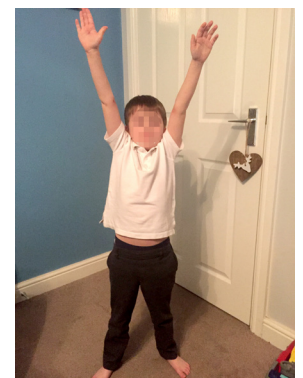
### Deep touch / firm pressure

- Firm hug; rub to arms, shoulders, back
- Hold or lean up against large stuffed animal or pillow
- Deep breathing with hand on belly
- Use a dry towel on dry hair to reduce sensitivity before washing or cutting
- Hold or wear something warm – keep clothes on the radiator until the last minute
- Create a den / hidey hole - pop up tent, under table, behind sofa with soft toys and blankets
- Chewy or crunchy foods at snack time, such as raw vegetables or fruit
- Wear a big heavy coat in cold weather
- Wear a backpack to go out carrying toys, snacks, books, etc.



### Joint movement and muscle stretch

- Reach up tall then crouch down to be as small as a ball
- Push hands - on a wall or hands together
- Interlock fingers and pull hands apart
- Push, pull or carry heavy items; help with tidying up
- Plenty of climbing and playing outside – try some 'animal walks'
- Run around outside in the fresh air, dig in the dirt, jump in puddles, make time to be messy
- Stand up tall and reach with arms held out to the side – build up length of time.



### Straight line movement

- Slow rocking on parent's knee
- Gentle swing on a garden or park swing
- Push along, Ride along, Scooter
- Walking, swimming, cycling .



## Calm the senses

- Keep the lights dim – use lamps instead of overhead lights
- Help to keep toys and activities tidy
- Notice the temperature – neutral warmth is usually most calming
- Blow bubbles with an adult
- Keep activities quiet, chose quieter places, turn off the TV
- Play soft music, the same music for each routine activity e.g., meal-times, school time, bed times
- Keep activities slow and steady, avoid needing to rush
- Have a picture timetable of what will happen next through the day
- Keep challenges to balance small e.g., when getting dressed, climbing into the bath, washing hair
- It may be useful to experiment with different textures on hands e.g., *pouring water from one cup to the next; rolling play dough or icing or finding different items hidden in jelly.*

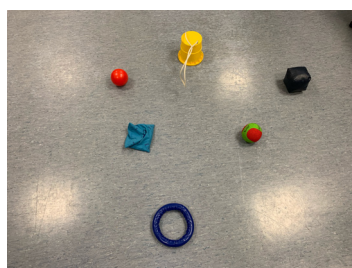
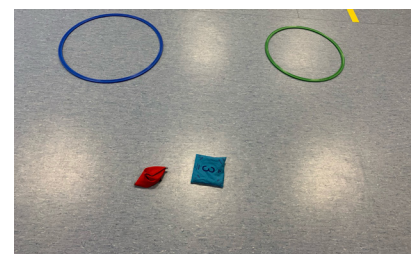
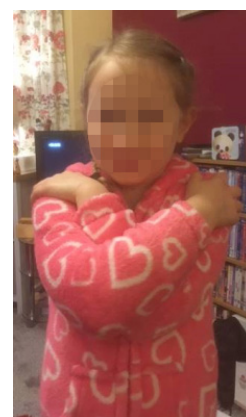




## Proprioceptive Activities for Children

Proprioception is the information that we get from muscles and joints to tell us where our body is in space. Activities that include heavy muscle work, such as pushing, pulling or carrying, give us lots of proprioception. These activities can help a highly sensitive child to calm, or to increase alertness in children who take their time to get going. They aim to get the child's 'arousal' levels just right. They can be used to calm a child when they need to be more focused e.g. before doing homework, or when they are becoming wound up. They also help to improve body awareness.

- Lemon squeezes (making a tight fist) and star stretches for fingers – Repeat 5 times
- Hand presses – interlock fingers, press heels of hands together and release 10 times
- Head presses – interlock fingers on top of head and push down
- Playing with playdough or using other resistive materials such as pastry
- Sitting on hands, tense whole body and lift legs off the floor – hold for 20 seconds then relax
- Wall presses – lean on the wall pressing firmly with both hands – press for 20 seconds. Try to 'push the wall over'
- Table push-ups – standing between two tables with a hand placed firmly on each. Lift legs to support full body weight with arms and hold for a count of 5 or 10
- Carrying, pushing and pulling objects e.g., The small supermarket trolley, carrying their school bag or pushing a pram
- Have the child carry appropriate weights in their pockets as they are walking
- Crashing into beanbags or crash mats
- Jumping on a trampoline – supervised and only used if the child enjoys it!
- Giving firm hugs
- Wrap up tightly in a towel after bath time and rub their limbs and back firmly
- Chewing gum (if suitable for your child)
- Sucking thick milkshakes through a straw
- Cycling
- Hopscotch
- Using heavy blankets or well tucked in bedding
- Climbing
- Using monkey bars
- Playing Tug of War
- Animal walks – pretend to be elephants, bears, frogs, kangaroos' etc. Try positions that get them on all fours or jumping
- Wheelbarrow walks
- Moving furniture to help with vacuuming
- Washing the car / floors / windows.



## Sensory Feeding Advice

**A child who is over-sensitive to touch (*tactile input*) and presents with oral sensitivities may:**

- Try to avoid meals / new foods, have a restricted diet or refuse to eat
- Display anxiety around meals and eating
- Choose to eat all food on the plate separately e.g., *eating all the meat first, then all the potatoes, then all the veg*
- Display sensitivity to sensory based activities e.g., *messy play, toothbrushing and hair washing.*

### Top Tips for Mealtimes

- Encourage the child to explore new foods in a calm and relaxed way. For example, encourage them to support with food preparation, where appropriate, and food play
- Keep a food diary – to look at the amounts eaten, what is eaten and responses to food
- Three meals and three small snacks spaced equally throughout the day are the best
- It can take 10-15 times before a child accepts a new taste. Introduce foods gradually, over time. Making food familiar through play, taking part in the cooking and even reading about it can help encourage acceptance
- It is important to be consistent and try to have dinner-table-based family meals together each week so your child can learn from watching others
- Offer healthy foods when they are hungry (snack box). The positive reinforcement gained from the relief of hunger will help your child learn to associate the different flavours and textures with a positive outcome
- Reward incentives – where five stickers can be exchanged for a prize e.g., *TV, favourite toy or Xbox*
- Distraction techniques – e.g., *having a fiddle toy or listening to calming, background music whilst seated at the table.*

## Oral – Motor Activities and Chewy Tubes

Offering additional oral – motor sensory input can help to meet the needs of a child who seeks additional sensory input through chewing non-food objects, but can also offer feedback to the joints and muscles around the mouth that can lessen sensitivity.

**Note: Children should be supervised when engaging in any activities listed below – activities should be stopped if there are any negative signs such as coughing / choking.**

### Fun Oral Motor Activities

The term 'Oral Motor' refers to the function of the muscles of the face (*lips, tongue, and jaw*). For chewing and swallowing, children need to have the right amount of strength, range of motion, and coordination. It may be useful to make a picture book that shows different oral exercises of 'How to warm up your mouth before eating' that you can show the child before eating.

#### Activity Ideas:

- Blowing bubbles or blowing a harmonica
- Practice sucking activities using a straw will work on oral motor which involves pursing lips. "Thin" liquids like *water* or *apple juice* are good starters. As you progress you might want to try a "thicker" liquid like a *milk shake*
- Using a toothbrush to brush the upper and lower lips
- Putting ice on the lips will help "wake up" our muscles. You can use a plain ice cube for this exercise. Run the ice cube from the middle of the lips to the corner of the mouth. Do this on both sides and then ask your child to lick it. Repeat the icing movements and the licking attempts several times.

### Chewy Tubes / Chewy Necklaces.

Chewy tubes are designed to be used by children who need help to develop their chewing ability, however the company that make them report that they can also be used by children who seek additional chewing.

Seeking to chew non-food objects is relatively common in children who have sensory issues. Chewing provides proprioception (feedback) through the jaw and is calming to the nervous system. It can therefore lessen inappropriate chewing behaviour, aggressive behaviour, and lessen sensitivity to food textures.

Having access to an item that is designed for chewing can also help children who find it difficult to concentrate and sit still by offering proprioceptive feedback.

Chewy Tubes and necklaces are available through an online search – children should always be supervised.



## Noise Sensitivity

We all detect sound slightly differently – some people under register sound and can be quite hard of hearing, whilst others are over sensitive, and can feel pain in their ears when exposed to sounds which to most others would just seem slightly louder than normal.

Certain sounds may trigger an extreme reaction, such as hoovers and power drills. In the case of the power drill, it could be a neighbour who uses it, but because of the pitch or the sudden onset of the sound, the youngster could find it hard to cope with.

Reactions to noise range from a child being upset, asking repetitive questions, shouting, unable to concentrate on an activity or conversation, screaming and having a panic attack.

### How to Help

- When the child becomes distressed by exposure to a sound, move the child away from that sound source if possible and then comfort and reassure him or her. Try to explain the source of the sound to the child and reassure there is no need for the child to be afraid
- Some children are helped by drawing or colouring in pictures of the items whose sounds distress them. The sound of the item can then be played, starting quietly, and increasing the sound level carefully
- Play therapy, or just playing with the child, could also help as it would distract the child
- Children may also be reassured if they know that it is normal to be afraid of some sounds, and others we can learn not to be scared of
- Repeated gentle exposure to the noise may help the child to reduce anxiety and desensitise the auditory aspect of the sensitivity. Use a computer or mobile phone on a very low volume. Gradually over a period of days or weeks increase the volume. Practice with the sounds under play conditions that the child can control, to help break the association of that sound with fear. This is not the same as unexpected exposure to the same sound, as people with hyperacusis (intolerance to everyday sounds that causes significant distress and affects a person's day-to-day activities) do say that they can often cope better if they are warned that a sound is about to occur
- Children should not be forced to stay in a situation that is causing them obvious distress (for example during singing in assembly). This may compound their apprehension and make them associate that situation (e.g., the assembly hall) with pain. If fear of a specific situation has become established, it is important to gradually desensitise the child, with time and care
- Older children may be reassured if they are told they have the teacher's permission to leave the classroom for a few minutes at any point if they are exposed to an aversive noise. It has been found that children do not abuse such an arrangement but are greatly reassured to know that they can leave a room, for a short time, if the noise becomes distressing to them
- The use of ear plugs, muffs or defenders should be avoided except in extreme or short-term, unavoidable situations (e.g., during a journey). Exposure to normal and tolerable sound is crucial if the ear and brain are to establish normal sensitivity.



## “After School ‘Meltdown’”

Often children with sensory processing difficulty appear to be coping well with the demands of the school day; however sometimes there can be an internal build-up of anxiety, as the child attempts to manage the continuous sensory challenges of their environment. It is not always easy to identify these anxieties, as the child may feel the need to conform to the behavioral boundaries set by school. In these instances, children often show the emotional weight of this build up when they are home, as they are then in a safe and protected environment where they feel comfortable to express this distress.

There are 7 things we can do, and teach our children to do, to release this bubble that bursts when we get home.

### 1. Re-connect positively

Greet your child with a smile and a hug, instead of ‘do you have any homework’, or ‘I heard you were in trouble today’. Also don’t ask ‘how was your day today?’ - no one really wants to answer this question.

### 2. Create space

Give your child time to sit or be quiet to hear his / her thoughts right after pick-up time. If you are driving, put on the radio and stay quiet. If you are walking, say little or just comment on the nice things you notice: ‘did you see that cute little yellow bird?’ or something similar. This isn’t the time for big conversations.

### 3. Feed them

Many children do better if they are not asked ‘are you hungry?’ Assume that many of your children’s tanks are empty when they get home. Fill the physical one by setting out food for them without saying anything. Real food such as veggie sticks, cut fruit, cheese or nuts will give them the boost they need. It might be helpful to put out glasses of water too.

### 4. Reduce the household clutter and noise

People are actually affected by what is in the space around them – some more so than others. Mornings can be hectic, but try to leave a fairly tidy house to arrive back home to. It might help to complete a “tidy up” routine each evening so that the house isn’t a disaster in the morning. Another suggestion is to wake up a bit earlier to put breakfast / lunch making food away before leaving for the day.

### 5. Stay connected throughout the day

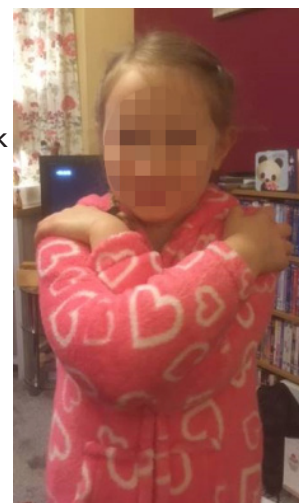
Use an age and personality-appropriate way to stay connected with your child when he or she is away from you during the day, some people call these ‘connection bridges’. You could try putting a little note in your child’s lunch box, or a special treat.

### 6. Provide decompression time

Depending on the personality of your child, provide a way to decompress at the end of the day. Give your child the lead to start talking when he or she is ready. When that time happens, you can inquire about any emotionally intense moments that may have happened during their day.

### 7. Have fun

Having fun is a great way to release tension from the day



## Interoception

Interoception is our sense of understanding and feeling what is going on inside the body. Children who have difficulty with sensory processing may have difficulty with interoception which could cause them to have difficulty knowing when they are hungry or full, hot or cold or recognising the need to use the toilet.

### This may include:

- Difficulties with toileting (bed wetting and accidents)
- May not recognise when they are thirsty or hungry – or may always feel thirsty and hungry
- Difficulty recognising senses such as temperature or pain
- Difficulty regulating emotions (not feeling when they are sad or angry).

### How to Help:

- Heavy work activities involving proprioceptive inputs
- Rhythmical movement such as swinging and bouncing
- Deep belly breaths / breathing activities
- Temperature activities (e.g., exploring warm items vs cold items – with adult supervision)
- Explore different sensations and textures through play
- Mindfulness activities and yoga poses.



# Fun Yoga Poses



Mountain



Tree I



Tree II



Warrior 1



Warrior 2



Warrior 3



Standing forward bend



Cow



Cat



Downward facing dog



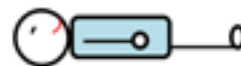
Cobra



Superman



Crossed Leg



Relax

## English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

## Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

## Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

## Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

## Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

## Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。