# **Strategies For Oral Sensory Seeking**

Is your child always chewing on something? Kids who are always sticking something in their mouth, chewing their clothes, and licking things may be oral sensory seeking. If you are tired of looking at worn out collars, duct taped coat corners and having a jolt of horror watching your child lick things in COVID times, here are 10 great strategies to address oral sensory seeking.

First, we’ll pause and address *why* they might be doing this. The mouth is a highly sensitive part of the body. It is how babies first explore their world and an important part of development. It brings a massive amount of sensory information in to the nervous system. This is the first clue about why a child may continue to fixate on oral input. If your child is [hyporesponsive](https://sensorysid.com/sensory-processing-disorder/#Hypo-hyper) to sensory input it means that they require more sensory input to meet their needs. It is logical, then, that the mouth and oral seeking can be their unbeknownst “solution”. We will break down our strategies for oral sensory seeking and also discuss ways to drop the old habits and get your child more regulated.

## Tools and tricks for oral seeking

This is going to be where we address specific techniques and ideas for providing appropriate oral sensory input. The goal here is not to make your child stop chewing or licking but rather to give them something appropriate to do so. Sometimes that means with food, flavors, chewies, or other tools for providing oral sensory input. Now it’s time for those 10 strategies for oral sensory seeking!

1. Gum. We’ll just go ahead and bust into a sensitive one right off the bat. This one obviously needs to be a careful decision based on the child. Be safe and make sure that your child is ready for gum. The recommended age is 4years old[1](https://www.scarsdalepediatricdental.com/blog/how-old-do-kids-need-to-be-to-chew-gum/#:~:text=To%20be%20on%20the%20safe%20side%2C%20the%20recommended,remind%20them%20to%20only%20chew%20and%20never%20swallow.). You will need to make sure that they can chew it without swallowing it and that they are responsible (or observed sufficiently) to make sure it ends up in the trash can. Gum can provide great, deep input to the jaw. You can look for stiffer gum brands like Double Bubble if your child really seems to crave a heavy chew. Want a focus boost? Use peppermint gum!
2. Chewy food. There are a myriad of options for food that will provide deep sensory input to the mouth. Some of my favorites are dried bananas and other fruit, fruit leathers, jerky, bagels, granola bars and some pizza crusts.
3. Crunchy food. Crunchy is a different, but intense input for the jaw. Watch your child to see if you can see a preference between chewy and crunchy food. Some kids like and crave both, and some are firmly in one camp or the other. Carrots, celery, apples and many other fresh fruits and vegetables fall into this category. Crisp crackers, rice cakes, hard candies, corn and other legume “nuts”, chips, and pretzels are other great crunchy options.
4. Intensely flavored foods. Bright and flavorful foods like pickles, mustard, spicy sauces, lemon, lime, grapefruit, sour candies and dried cranberries are all good examples.
5. Temperature boost. Using varied temperatures is a great way to provide a very different kind of oral input. Warmed up food (and especially if paired with) cold food is a great way to “surprise” the mouth. Try having a tea party with warm tea and little ice cubes. Other great cold options are smoothies, frozen berries, and popsicles.
6. Drinking through a straw. Drinking through a straw provides a lot of oral motor “work” and great sensory input. For a quick focus boost, try having your child suck applesauce, smoothie, or soft yogurt through a wide, short straw. The combination of oral motor ”work” and drawing in and down of the eyes can bring calming and focus.
7. Vibration. Vibration is a great way to provide intense input to the mouth and face. This can be as simple as a vibrating toothbrush or one of the many vibrating therapy tools like Z-vibe(R). Running the vibration around the mouth and face as well as in the mouth can be a great way to meet oral sensory seeking needs.
8. “Chewies”. There are many sensory tools available to provide appropriate oral sensory input. They come in different densities, strengths, textures, shapes and methods. You may want to try several and see what works best for your child. If they are constantly chewing on their clothes, perhaps you want to try a necklace chewy (make sure they are safe with a necklace style and the breakaway clasp for safety is a must). If your child is self conscious, try looking for “teething jewelry”—they have some elegant styles that will still provide a safe option, although perhaps not as hardy for a firm chewer. Other options work well for putting in pockets, purses and in areas where you notice their chewing needs increase. If your child is a pencil chewer, get a small piece of [theratube](https://www.amazon.com/TheraBand-Resistance-Professional-Exercise-Physical/dp/B0037IUXFY/ref=sr_1_11?crid=39NNZ8EJ57OYX&keywords=Theratube&qid=1644107715&sprefix=theratube%2Caps%2C186&sr=8-11) and fit it over their pencil for them to chew.
9. Blowing games. These are a great functional way to provide oral input. Blowing bubbles, a [floating blow pipe](https://www.amazon.com/STOBOK-Classic-Floating-Reliever-Children/dp/B07HLS8MKG/ref=sr_1_4?crid=37FGIFH940B0R&keywords=Floating+blow+pipe&qid=1644104706&sprefix=floating+blow+pipe%2Caps%2C201&sr=8-4) game, blow up balloons, blow a pinwheel, whistles, recorders and other musical instruments work well. Kazoos are awesome, and don’t forget the comb and waxpaper version! One of my favorite standbys is to give kids a straw and a cotton ball and have them blow it across the room, race with a sibling, or create their own “cotton ball obstacle course”.
10. Mouth exercises. This probably needs to be presented more as “can you do this?” and not as exercises, (wink, wink) but these are great, and fun! Play “lizard”. Give your kiddos some cheerios on a plate and see if they can stick out their tongue (pointy shape) and stick a cheerio on the tip before pulling it back in. Have them touch the tip of their tongue to the inside of each tooth. Roll the tongue (maybe they can, maybe they can’t—that isn’t important). See how far to the sides they can lick food off their face. Make a fishy face. Try to touch the tongue to the tip of the nose. Gently suck in the lips and pinch them between the teeth. Smack the lips together and try making different sounds (change how full of air the cheeks are). Blow the cheeks full of air and hold for a few seconds. Give your kids creative and safe ways to get sensory input through their mouth.

## Sleuth it out

So, now you have plenty of tools in your tool bag for providing appropriate oral sensory input, but how do you minimize that undesired chewing or licking habit? First, you need to sleuth out what is triggering this behavior. Are they stressed? Trying to focus on school? Anxious? Dysregulated? Bored? Paying attention to what happens before they start the undesired habit may give you some really important clues.

Next, how you start the change matters. Try not to focus on the undesired habit and instead find those acceptable alternatives. This may take a lot of trial and effort to see what works best for your child. Don’t get discouraged if what works changes for them as well.

Make sure that you make the new, acceptable options easy for your child. They should be kept handy, particularly for those circumstances that you find trigger the chewing.

If you notice that your child is an anxious or bored chewer, look for ways to circumvent. For stress and anxiety, try talking though strategies for your child and set them up for success. For boredom, keep activities at hand that keep them busy (particularly their brain and body at the same time). Using fidget toys can sometimes reduce chewing and licking. Other types of movement can sometimes replace chewing for focus, or use some of those great strategies up above.

If your child seems to chew more when they are dysregulated, there are several things you can do to help.

## Help them regulate

Sensory dysregulation can appear in many ways. If you notice your child struggling more with taking in, processing and responding appropriately to sensory input, maybe it’s time to pause other activities and help them out. Sometimes this is targeting certain types of input that will get your child back on track and sometimes this means doing a full [sensory diet](https://sensorysid.com/sensory-diet/).

Frequent successful activities to get a child more regulated include heavy work activities like jumping, animals walks, yoga moves (check out [cosmic kids yoga](https://cosmickids.com/)!) and anything that gets their muscles pumping. Deep pressure activities like [joint compressions](https://sensorysid.com/joint-compressions/), pillow squishes, and “kid burritos” (roll them tightly in a blanket) work great as well. Some kids respond really well to tactile input instead. For this, try your favorite sensory bin (see my blog on how to create your own [here](https://sensorysid.com/how-to-make-your-own-sensory-bin/)), [skin brushing](https://sensorysid.com/skin-brushing/), or some dough play. See what works for your child!

Many kids are oral sensory seekers, and we hope that this list of 10 strategies for oral sensory seeking was helpful to you.

[10 Strategies For Oral Sensory Seeking - Sensory Sid - Blog](https://sensorysid.com/10-strategies-for-oral-sensory-seeking/)