

HEAVY WORK FOR THE MOUTH



BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS

The resistive input obtained through heavy work activities is generally organizing and calming for the nervous system. Heavy work can be applied to the whole body, the hands or the mouth. Many people find oral heavy work very regulating.

Check with parents before trying these ideas.

ACTIVITIES

- Sucking on a water bottle:
 - Make sure the student's water bottle has a suck-style top and not a pour spout.
 - Prompt him/her to take frequent drinks while sitting calmly.
 - This can be especially useful to calm the body quickly after a movement break.
 - Consider a thicker liquid for stronger sucking with a straw - smoothie or yogurt.
 - Also, fruit squeeze pouches provide another chance for sucking (soothing) input.
- Crunchy and chewy snacks:
 - In addition to being regulating, this type of input can also reduce oral sensitivity and provide an internal noise in the child's head to help reduce external auditory distractions.
 - Gum – big or multiple pieces work best. See list of rules on next page.
 - Fruit chew candies, licorice. These work even better if kept in the fridge.
 - Fruit roll-ups or the old fashioned fruit leather
 - Dried fruit pieces
 - Beef jerky
 - Pepperoni sticks
 - Bagels instead of bread
 - Granola bars, especially if kept in the fridge
 - Raw veggies – carrots, celery, cucumber, pepper, snap peas
 - Apples
 - Pretzels, popcorn, pork rinds and nacho chips to crunch
 - Nuts
 - Roasted chickpeas
- A chew tool:
 - For students who continue to seek oral input, even with lots of opportunities to suck water and have chewy/crunchy snacks, consider trying a dedicated chew tool. These offer a safe and accessible chew option to children who may be chewing their clothes or classroom items. Chew tools can be hand-held, or worn as a necklace, a bracelet or pinned to the student's shirt.
 - Some examples: <https://www.fdm.ca/en/chewelry>
 - Work with parents to find suitable options and monitor the effectiveness of each tool.
 - Ensure the student is always supervised when using a chew tool.

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GUM RULES:

Review these rules with students using this strategy:

1. *The gum stays on the teacher's desk.*
2. *You put one/two pieces in your mouth and keep the paper wrapper in your pocket.*
3. *Gum stays in your mouth - no pulling it out with your fingers. You only chew gum in the classroom.*
4. *When you've had enough of the gum or it's time to leave the classroom, spit the gum onto the paper (from your pocket), wrap it up, put it in the garbage.*

It's not usually very effective to use standard chewing gum, unless you use multiple pieces in your mouth at the one time. The bigger pieces of bubble gum are usually more beneficial. If the student blows bubbles that becomes a distraction, add "no bubbles" to the list of rules.