



Silly Straw

Benefits:

Drinking through a silly straw can help to improve many functions: interhemispheric integration, binocular functions (eye teaming), light sensitivity, sound sensitivity, articulation, bowel and bladder control, tongue and lip control for articulation, facial muscle tone for nonverbal communication, and more.

Materials:

You will need a silly straw - one of those plastic straws with lots of curls or twists and a small diameter, and a clear drink. The twists and turns of the silly straw create more resistance in sucking, so people whose ears are very sensitive should use a regular straw instead of a silly straw, because you have to suck so much harder through a silly straw that it might be painful. Water is the recommended beverage, since water is essential to healthy brain and body functions. Also, it is easiest to clean a silly straw if it is used only for water.

Procedure:

Hold the straw in the center of your mouth, and sip and swallow, allowing a rhythmic pattern to develop if you can. You will benefit more from doing this with your eyes closed unless your eyes tend to over-converge. If you have a tendency for, or a history of, crossed eyes, be sure that you look at a distant object while drinking.

Variations:

1. When there is a fear of aspiration, sucking is still possible with an activity such as using a straw to create enough suction to transfer small bits of colored paper from the table to make a mosaic on a larger piece of paper. Or use the straw to pick up a light object, such as a paper napkin, to transfer it from one side of a tray to the other.
2. If you cannot swallow thin liquids, use a thick beverage and drink it through a regular straw.

Precautions:

Be sure to rinse out the straw well after each drink, so harmful bacteria do not build up in the loops. If you are pregnant, do not engage in this intense sucking, as it may stimulate contractions.

That's all there is to it for this go-anywhere, non-obvious, fun and therapeutic activity.

More about the benefits of using a silly straw:

When you examine the importance of sucking in human development, it is truly profound. Not only do we suck for nourishment, but also in sucking we do many other amazing things:

- We integrate the two sides of our mouth and cheeks, stimulating the two cerebral hemispheres in a coordinated rhythmic fashion. This enhances our interhemispheric integration in general. We rely on interhemispheric integration to be able to process

language, balance our instincts with logic, and so many other functions frequently compromised in neurobehavioral disorders as well as in brain injury.

- As we suck, many of our cranial nerves are stimulated, and they in turn help regulate many aspects of our vision, including the ability of our eyes to converge – that is focus together on a target (and, by converging on the face of our caregiver who is feeding us, we send messages about faces to the fusiform face area of the brain).

- One reason that people become light sensitive is that the two eyes do not team in their processing of visual images, which of course is based on perception of light and darkness. Another is that the pupils have a reduced degree of reactivity to light. Drinking through the straw enhances these functions and thereby reduces light sensitivity.

- Stimulation of the trigeminal and facial nerves directly stimulates structures in the middle ear, also, dampening the volume of the sounds we hear. It is common knowledge that chewing gum or sucking helps people tolerate the pressure change in their ears during take-off and landing on flights. And through a connection in the part of the midbrain called the colliculus, visual focus directs auditory focus, connecting the work of the Silly Straw in improving visual focus with reduction of distractibility to noises in the environment.

- Of course, we increase tongue and lip control and coordinated breathing, all of which support our ability to speak with good articulation.

- A little known fact (shared by Paula Garbourg in *The Secret of the Ring Muscles*) is that when we strengthen any set of sphincter muscles (such as the lips and also the esophagus) we strengthen all the sphincters in our body (such as the pupils of the eyes and the bowel and bladder, too).

- Sucking, especially early in life, also stimulates the pituitary gland for balanced hormone production, including the human growth factor hormone