

## Tips For Shopping Trips

While some of us, who are autistic, love nothing more than a trip to the supermarket for others of us, it can be our worst nightmare leading to confusion, overstimulation and even pain. Supermarkets by nature are highly stimulating, unpredictable places, somewhere that people who experience hypersensitivities may find extremely uncomfortable.

For these reasons it may be worth considering reducing the need to visit the supermarket altogether opting instead for online delivery or services like 'click and collect'. However, life is unpredictable and if visiting the supermarket is a necessity for your family from time to time, from our experience it would be good to consider the following things:

- Try and get to the bottom of what makes a visit to the supermarket difficult. If possible, ask for an explanation or observe when in the environment. There are a wealth of possibilities including anything from the sound of the trolley wheels and clicking heels to the smell of the freshly baked bread.
- Plan ahead using a visual timetable, maybe adding something to the end of the timetable that the person likes or will look forward to, for example shopping then a visit to the park.
- Break the trip down - some people will need more information than just the 'shopping picture'. Some of us may need the whole process broken down into smaller steps. For example, enter shop, find trolley, aisle 1, 2, 3, checkout. This level of predictability can help to reduce anxiety.
- Increase involvement in the process by making a visual shopping list. This can act as a possible distractor, offers a countdown of how long it may take and promotes lots of thinking skills.
- Ring ahead and find out what time the store is usually a little quieter. Some stores have started doing an autism friendly hour where the music and tannoid announcements get turned off. It is worth asking prior to visiting what the shop does in this time, as experiences can vary from place to place.
- Headphones with music on can act as a welcome distractor. You could also use the songs as a timer. So for example by the end of song seven we will have finished (always add longer than you might need, in case of any unexpected detours).
- Supermarkets can be very bright, visually overwhelming places, sunglasses may help.
- Take along favourite snacks and offer them at the start of the shopping trip (lollipops might be an idea as they last a while) as sucking and chewing can also provide calming sensory input.