

The Synaesthetic Spectrum



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What is Synaesthesia?

Synaesthesia is a beautifully diverse way some brains process the world, where senses are stimulated in unique and vivid ways. Instead of being "extra" or "strange," it's simply another way of perceiving the world. Sensory magic with a grounded nervous system twist.

There are many types of synaesthesia, and no two synaesthetic experiences are alike.

Synaesthesia isn't a deficit, it's a form of sensory variation. If you experience it, you're not "making it up." You are living a beautifully wired, multi-experiential life. 🧠



The following are just a few types of synaesthesia, all valid, all real, all deeply human:

 **Grapheme–Colour Synaesthesia:**

Letters or/and numbers each have a colour – "A" might always be red, and "5" might feel forest green.

 **Chromesthesia:**

Sounds evoke colours. A kettle boiling might shimmer silver. A violin note might swirl violet. Music becomes not just heard, but seen.

 **Mirror–Touch Synaesthesia:**

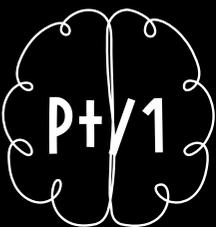
You feel what others feel – someone rubbing their arm, and your own arm tingles. It's not "too much empathy" – it's sensory cross-modal perception, and it can be beautiful and intense.

 **Time–Space Synaesthesia:**

You see months, years, or dates spatially. The calendar wraps around you. Tuesday might sit to your left, and July might be far behind your shoulder.

 **Lexical–Gustatory Synaesthesia:**

Words or names evoke taste. "David" might taste like lemon. "Tuesday" like burnt toast. Language, made flavourful.





What Is Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia?

Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia is a form of synaesthesia, a condition where stimulation of one sensory pathway leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory pathway.

In MTS, visual perception of touch or pain in others elicits tactile sensations in the observer. For instance, seeing someone tap their shoulder might cause the observer to feel a tap on their own shoulder. This mirroring can occur on the same side of the body or the opposite, depending on the individual.

The phenomenon is thought to be linked to hyperactivity in the brain's mirror neuron system, which is involved in understanding others' actions and emotions. While mirror neurons help most people empathise by simulating others' experiences mentally, in MTS, this simulation extends to actual physical sensations.



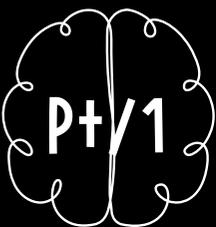
In a Sense, "I Feel What You Feel": Exploring Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia

Imagine watching someone get a paper cut and feeling a sharp sting on your own finger or your reflex's flinch.

For individuals with Mirror-Touch Synaesthesia (MTS), this is a daily reality.

MTS is a rare neurological condition where observing someone else being touched or in pain stimulates the similar sensation on the observer's own body.

It is as if their sensory systems mirror the experiences of others, leading to profound physical empathy.





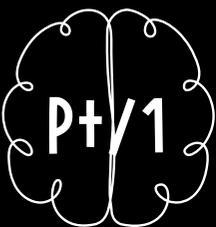
Personal Experiences: Living with MTS

The experiences of those with MTS vary widely, from mild sensations to intense physical responses.

"As far back as I can remember, understanding my MTS has always made me more considerate about the feelings of others."

However, the condition can also be overwhelming.

"Crowds can still be overwhelming. Waiting rooms can be overwhelming. Every day I feel strangers hurting. So completely and thoroughly, with all of myself. MTS is why I wanted to help people, what makes me good at my job, and what makes me good with my clients, but it's also part of what makes it hard to do."





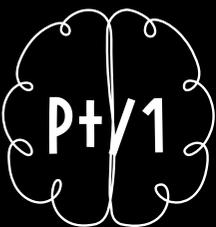
The Science Behind MTS

Research into MTS is ongoing, but studies suggest that individuals who experience MTS have heightened activity in brain regions associated with empathy and touch perception.

Functional MRI scans have shown that observing touch activates the somatosensory cortex in MTS individuals, the same area that processes actual physical touch.

This neural mirroring provides insight into the mechanisms of empathy and how closely our sensory experiences are tied to our perceptions of others.

Understanding MTS not only sheds light on this rare condition but also offers a window into the broader human capacity for empathy.



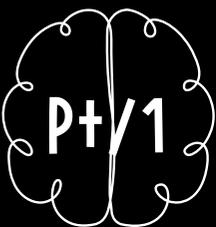


Coping Strategies and Support

Living with MTS often requires strategies to manage the influx of sensory information. Some individuals find relief by avoiding certain visual stimuli, such as violent movies or crowded places.

Mindfulness practices and grounding techniques can also help individuals distinguish between their own sensations and those mirrored from others.

For those seeking support, connecting with communities of individuals with synaesthesia can provide understanding and shared coping mechanisms. Mental health professionals familiar with sensory processing differences can offer tailored strategies to manage the condition's impact on daily life.



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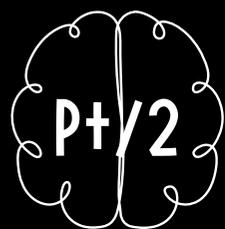
Grapheme–Colour Synaesthesia:

The Alphabets That Paint The Sky

For some Neurodivergent minds, the alphabet doesn't just tell a story, it is a story in colour. Grapheme–Colour Synaesthesia is a beautifully unique perceptual experience where individual letters or numbers are consistently associated with specific colours.

Imagine a world where every "A" has always been crimson, where "7" radiates a sandy ochre, or where the word "hello" shimmers in gradients of pastel green and violet. These associations are not imagined, nor chosen. They are deeply embedded, as real and consistent as a memory.

"I never realised [until I was older] other people didn't see the calendar as a rainbow. I thought it was just part of how brains worked."





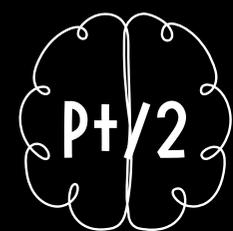
Often, people with grapheme–colour synaesthesia discover their experience later in life, only upon realising others don't see colours when reading or doing math.

This form of synaesthesia can bring a vivid beauty to language and learning, or at times, sensory overwhelm, especially when letters or numbers are the 'wrong' colours (think: black and white worksheets or digital fonts).

✦ It's not a gimmick – it's a consistent, involuntary sensory mapping that helps cognition and memory.

Let's affirm that this isn't a distraction or disorder, it's a vivid, sensory way of engaging with the world.

It can make reading, memory, and creative play beautifully unique. It is also why it is crucial that we educate the world about the diversity of how brains process the world around us.





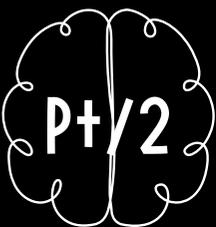
Polyvocal Reflections – How I ND: When letters and numbers have hues

"For me, numbers are colours first and values second. Doing calculations with '3' feels like working with yellow energy, while '8' is always cool and dark like navy. If something doesn't match the colour it's supposed to be, my brain gets stuck. It's not just about reading – it's about feeling in sync."

Aisha says, "My homework isn't just words, it's a rainbow. Colour helps me remember and makes reading a sensory experience."

Mark shares, "Calculations are easier when 7 is green and 3 is yellow. It's my built-in mnemonic."

Eli shares, "I use coloured pens that match my internal palette— for me, purple 'P' isn't just the letter P: it's my feel."





Chromesthesia:

When Sound Paints the Room

What does your favourite song look like?

For those with Chromesthesia, sound and colour are in constant conversation. A kettle's whistle might shimmer silver, a dog bark may shoot a jagged red bolt through your inner vision, and a cello note might bloom in lush indigo waves.

This isn't metaphor, it's multisensory processing, and for those who experience it, it can be deeply intuitive. Every sound carries a colour, texture, shape, or movement. Some describe it as "a movie in my mind," others as a floating aura of motion.

"My friend's voice is orange. Not just sometimes. Always. If she's loud, it gets neon."





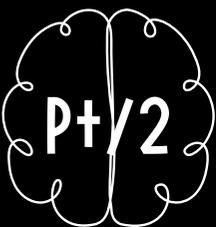
Chromesthesia is often connected with musical creativity, but it's not always calm or beautiful.

Loud or sharp sounds might cause visual overstimulation, leading to shutdowns or overload.

Many Autistic and Neurodivergent folks with Chromesthesia describe needing auditory and visual control to maintain regulation.

✦ Sound becomes a multi-sensory canvas – visual, emotional, alive.

Chromesthesia, like all forms of synaesthesia, isn't about making things up, it's about making sense of the world in a deeply embodied way.





Polyvocal Reflections – How I ND:

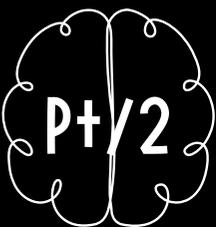
When music shows you colour & movement

"For years I thought everyone saw sounds. I'd wonder why people weren't distracted by how grey and scratchy the school bell was. Music is a gift, I see the rhythm, the colour, the shape. But noisy places? That's when the colours crash into each other."

Sam, a musician: "Composing is like painting. My songs have colour palettes and brush strokes in my mind."

Jess recalls: "An ambulance siren is sharp red; rain tapping on glass is a deep blue ripple."

Dana shares: "Listening to rain is like watching a slow blue-green waterfall, centred breathing, grounded calm."



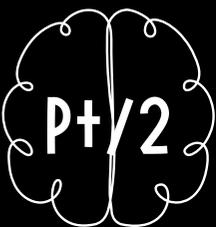


Time—Space Synaesthesia: The Calendar Wraps Around Me

Time—Space Synaesthesia is when time is not just felt, it's seen and placed. Days, months, years, decades – all exist as a consistent spatial map. For some, the week forms a circle. For others, years stretch in ribbons, spirals, ladders, or stacked boxes. Tuesday may always be to the left; September may appear diagonally down and to the right.

This perception is deeply intuitive. It's not chosen. It's not a memory aid. It's just how time exists in the mind.

"The months wrap around me like a racetrack. I always know where I am – not emotionally, but physically, in the year."



In a world built on linear calendars and two-dimensional timetables, living with Time–Space Synaesthesia can be both grounding and challenging. Planning events, reflecting on memory, or visualising the future can feel like physically moving through a space – sometimes comforting, sometimes overwhelming.

✦ Time isn't intangible, it's woven into our spatial sense, guiding memory and planning effortlessly.

This form of synaesthesia is a quiet kind of brilliance, one that orients Neurodivergent people in time and space like an internal compass only they can see.



Polyvocal Reflections – How I ND: When time takes shape around you

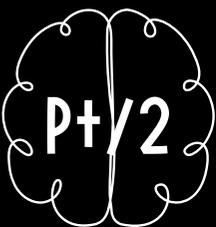
"I always thought people were pretending when they said 'next month'. It's right there, behind my shoulder. I can literally turn and point to where it is. My memory works in visuals. I can walk through the week in my head and stop where I left my thoughts."

Holly describes her year as a circular track surrounding her body:

"Summers are high arcs, winters dip low."

Tom says, "Thursday is always that dark blue square over there, floating just past my left shoulder."

Riley shares: "Sundays are pale lavender and float behind me, my week lives in colour and shape."



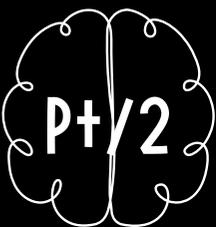


**AB
CD** Lexical–Gustatory Synaesthesia:
When Words Taste Like Toast

Lexical–Gustatory Synaesthesia brings together the senses of language and taste. Names, words, syllables, each one may evoke a very specific taste or texture. "Monday" might taste like mint. "Elephant" might bring the sensation of peanut butter. "Daniel" might feel like biting into celery.

These sensations are not imagined or associative, they are consistent, involuntary, and often vividly specific.

"The word 'table' tastes like metal. I can't say it without that sharp taste. It's not unpleasant, just always there."





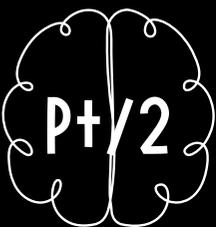
For many with Lexical–Gustatory Synaesthesia, it creates a unique relationship with words and names.

Some avoid certain words that taste bad. Others savour language like a meal. And in moments of stress or overwhelm, some tastes become more intense, creating an added sensory layer that few around them may understand.

✦ Language becomes a sensory experience, rich with texture and flavour.

This form of synaesthesia is rare and often misunderstood, but it reveals just how beautifully layered sensory experiences can be, especially in neurodivergent people.

It shows us that communication can be textured, sensory, and deeply personal.





Polyvocal Reflections – How I ND:

When words are flavours

"When I was a kid, I didn't want to say my teacher's name. It tasted like wet socks. No one believed me. It wasn't defiance, it was just... gross. I still pick my words based on how they taste in my mouth."

Nina: "Greeting someone isn't just words, it's flavours. My partner tastes like vanilla almond."

Ben: "Reading a spicy word makes me salivate. It's surreal, but grounding."

Mitch: "My name tastes like tart apple. A good reminder I exist, flavour is identity."

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Embracing the Synaesthetic Spectrum

Synaesthesia is not a quirk. It's not a problem to solve. It's a way of being in the world – a vivid, layered, often misunderstood richness that deserves space and celebration.

Whether it's hearing colours, seeing time, tasting words, or painting numbers in your mind's eye – you are not alone. And you're not imagining it.

There are Many Variations

Synaesthesia isn't limited to what we have listed. There are over 60 identified types, sound-touch, emotion-colour, smell-colour, multi-sensory forms (single sound might evoke colour, movement, shape), and projective and associative (some see the colour visually ["projective"], others feel the link in their mind ["associative"]).



Embrace Your Sensory World

Synaesthesia isn't a problem. It reveals the beautiful diversity of human perception.

If this resonates:

Explore it – notice if your brain experiences senses that overlap.

Record patterns – keep a journal or colour palette mapping your associations.

Share with community – find connection, reduce isolation.

Normalise it – this is your natural way of being.

If synaesthesia is part of your reality, know: you're not making it up. You're living in a world layered, textured, coloured, flavoured, shaped, uniquely yours.



Embracing Neurodiversity

Synaesthesia exemplifies the diversity of human sensory experiences.

While each variety can present unique challenges, they also offer profound insights into empathy, creativity, sensory experiences, and human connection.

By acknowledging and supporting neurodiverse experiences, we move towards a more inclusive understanding of the human mind.

As we continue to explore the intricacies of experiences like synaesthesia, we not only learn about the extraordinary capabilities of the brain but also about the depth of human cognition and the varied ways we connect with one another.

As GRANN always says:

♥ "You're not "too much" – the world is just too busy trying to blend in for how beautifully your brain works." ♥

