



Complex Child E-Magazine

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Non-Food Stocking Stuffers

by Susan Agrawal

When we think of Christmas stockings, our minds often jump to the food items that constitute a large proportion of stocking stuffers: candy canes, chocolates, oranges, and other treats. But many children with complex medical issues or special needs are unable to eat these foods. Some may have food allergies or be on special diets such as the ketogenic diet. Others may be tube fed or obtain their nutrition through an I.V. And others may not be able to chew solid foods, or may have sensory issues with certain textures.

It can be quite a challenge to find fun and unique stocking stuffers for children who do not eat or have restricted diets. But it is possible, and you may even be able to give your child a gift that will help with her development or rehabilitation.

Sensory Gifts

Sensory items make wonderful stocking stuffers! Many of them are small items that fit inside a stocking with no problem. Best of all, many are available at regular stores, such as pharmacies or big box stores. Here are just a few ideas:

- ❑ **Sensory balls and grabbers**, such as sticky balls, light-up balls, balls with tentacles, spiky balls. These can be found in many pharmacies or through special needs websites and are usually about \$5-\$10 each. Achievement Products has a great assortment at http://www.specialkidszone.com/Product_Level2.asp?SubCategoryID=105.
- ❑ **Glitter wands**. These can be found in any toy store or through special needs websites for under \$5.
- ❑ **Therapy brushes**. Unless you can nab one off a surgeon, these need to be purchased through special needs websites. They are about \$2.
- ❑ **Small massagers or vibratory toys**. These are available at most pharmacies, novelty shops, and through special needs websites. They range from \$5-\$25.
- ❑ **Play dough, silly putty, or therapy putty**. Play dough is widely available for as little as \$1. Therapy putty may be found on special needs websites and is used to strengthen hands.
- ❑ **Slime**. This is readily available at toy stores or can be homemade with water, glue and borax.

- ❑ **Jingle bell bracelets and anklets.** A great option for the holidays! These are readily available at toy stores and novelty stores, especially around the holidays.
- ❑ **Fidgets.** These little gadgets are great for keeping little fingers occupied and include pencil fidgets, chewable fidgets, and so forth. While you may find some in regular stores, catalogs like Integrations [<http://www.integrationscatalog.com>] carry a large selection. They range from \$2-\$20.

Oral Motor Gifts

For children who are learning to eat, an oral/motor tool may be a perfect gift. Most are small and will easily fit into a stocking. The majority will need to be ordered from special needs websites, though some items may be available at toy stores. Here are a few ideas:

- ❑ **Chewy tubes, grabbers, and other chewables.** These are great for exercising the mouth and jaw and are usually under \$10. See <http://www.chewytubes.com/> or http://www.arktherapeutic.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=ATSI&Category_Code=Chew for the two major styles available.
- ❑ **Probes and Vibrating Probes.** These are wonderful for stimulating the mouth, tongue, and lips. The oral probes are very inexpensive, while the vibrating ones tend to be more expensive. See http://arktherapeutic.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=ATSI&Category_Code=Probe or http://arktherapeutic.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=ATSI&Category_Code=Z-Vibes-Tips-Kits
- ❑ **One way straws.** Great for children learning how to sip and only about \$1 each. See http://arktherapeutic.com/Merchant2/merchant.mvc?Screen=CTGY&Store_Code=ATSI&Category_Code=Straws
- ❑ **Whistles and Kazoos.** Whistles are great for working on blowing and lip closure. Many fun styles are available at your local toy store. There is also a great selection at this website: http://www.specialkidszone.com/Product_Level2.asp?SubCategoryID=99
- ❑ **Bubbles.** Bubbles also work on blowing and mouth formation and are widely available for less than \$1.
- ❑ **Toothbrushes.** Don't forget a toothbrush and some paste to keep the teeth shiny and clean! Spin-brushes are particularly fun for many children with oral/motor issues.
- ❑ **Spoons.** Textured spoons, therapy spoons, and baby spoons are also a great gift for emerging eaters and are very inexpensive.

Fun Toys, Books, and Doodads

Don't forget the fun toys! These are available widely, all for under \$10.

- ❑ **For younger kids:** rattles, small board books or bathtub books, teethers, pacifiers, rings or links, baby trucks, and small stuffed animals.
- ❑ **For older kids:** color-changing bath tablets, bubble bath, hairbows, little cars and trucks, Thomas and Brio trains and track, small balls, iTunes gift cards, action figures, Little People items, art supplies, small dolls, tub toys, flash or PECS cards, and small musical instruments.

Wishing you a wonderful and imaginative holiday season!

*For a list of Special Needs Merchandisers, see this article:
<http://www.articles.complexchild.com/Nov2008/00083.html>*

