

HOW TO SPOT



SIGNS OF SENSORY INTEGRATIVE DYSFUNCTION

Child demonstrates any combination of the following:

- Over-sensitivity to touch, movement, sights or sounds
- Under-reactive to touch, movement, sights or sounds
- Easily distracted
- Social and/or emotional problems
- Activity level that is unusually high or unusually low
- Physical clumsiness or apparent carelessness
- Impulsive, lacking in self control
- Difficulty making transitions from one situation to another
- Inability to unwind or calm self
- Poor self concept
- Delays in speech, language, or motor skills
- Delays in academic achievement

Frequently Asked Questions

What IS sensory integration?

Our senses work in concert with one another to give us information about our bodies, where we are in the environment, where our body parts are in relation to one another, and what is going on around us. It is the *feedback* mechanism that informs us how to interact appropriately in our environment. *Sensory integration* is the critical function of the brain that is responsible for organizing sensory information and producing the composite picture which informs us how to interact with the environment- emotionally and motorically (*Feedforward*). Sensory integration provides a crucial foundation for later, more complex learning and behavior.

What happens when sensory systems are not functioning effectively?

For most children, sensory integration develops in the course of ordinary childhood activities. When deficits in sensory registration, processing, or modulation occur, both physical and environmental cues may not be detected (under-reactive), they might be overwhelming (over-reactive), or they might simply make no sense. These difficulties can have a profound effect on educational performance and the ability to interact appropriately with peers, adults, and the environment. You have probably seen children who, although bright, have difficulty using a pencil, playing with toys, or doing self-care tasks, like dressing. You may have seen a child so fearful of movement that ordinary swings, slides, jungle gyms, or even tricycles generate fear and insecurity. You have also seen the child whose problems lie at the opposite extreme- acting impulsively, moving continuously, falling, and often running headlong into dangerous situations without hesitation.

Who is at risk for sensory integrative dysfunction?

It is important to remember that not all children with a particular diagnosis present signs of sensory integrative problems. However, some relationships can be identified.

Learning disabilities - Research clearly identifies sensory integrative problems with this population, as these children are more likely than their peers to have been born pre-mature, to have experienced early developmental problems, and to have poor motor coordination. Early intervention can improve sensory integration in these children, minimizing the possibility of school failure before it occurs.

Premature birth - More and more premature infants survive today. They enter a world with fragile, easily overstimulated nervous systems and sometimes medical complications.

Autism and other developmental disorders - Severe difficulty with sensory processing is often a hallmark of this disorder. Autistic children seek out unusual quantities of certain types of sensations and are extremely hypersensitive to other types. Similar traits are often seen in other children with developmental disorders. Improving sensory processing leads these children to more productive contacts with people and environments.

Brain injury - Trauma to the brain from accidents and strokes can have profound effects on sensory functioning.

Can anything be done to facilitate sensory integration?

Intervention strategies were primarily developed by Dr. A. Jean Ayres based upon extensive research in the areas of neuro-physiology, neuropsychology, child development, occupational and physical therapy. As with many disciplines, early intervention is believed to be key in affecting change and facilitating normal development.