

Providing A Sensory Diet in the Home

When a child has sensory integration difficulties, a program of sensory stimulation will help them in tolerating the general sensory stress of daily life. For the best results, the program should include a combination of:

- **Vestibular (movement)** – Vestibular input is the sense that notifies us of any change in position, direction or movement of the head. This also works on addressing balance and movement.
- **Proprioception (heavy work)** – Proprioception helps us to know where your body is in space, how your body is moving, and how much strength our muscles need to use when completing a task.
- **Tactile (touch)**

Learning and self-regulation is built on a strong foundation of these three sensory systems. Our other senses build off of these foundational senses, so when these are developed, we are able to calm and regulate our bodies and tolerate other sensory input easier.

Below are some ideas for providing input into these systems. The frequency and amount of time it takes to do this will depend on your child and their needs. It is best to start out by doing one or two things daily for 20 to 30 minutes. Remember to use the stimulation that benefits your child depending on whether they need to be calmed or they need to be alerted:

- **Fast movement is arousing**
- **Slow/linear (back and forth or pendulum) movement is calming**
- **Spinning movement is usually arousing**
- **Heavy work can be calming or energizing (try to follow up with calming activity if the child appears more energized)**

Providing Vestibular (Movement) in the home:

1. **On a large therapy or play ball:** Have your child lie on his tummy over the ball and hold onto their trunk; rock him forward and backward; put weight into their feet and then forward to put weight on their hands, lowering them slowly to their head; wait for your child to push up with their hands and then rock them back to feet again. Repeat this five to ten times. As they gain balance and understand this activity, they may be able to do it by themselves safely on a moderately sized ball.

Have them sit on a ball facing you, and hold them firmly around the hips; rock them backward and forward and side to side; bounce them up and down as well, sing a song as you do so.

2. **Swinging in a blanket or sheet (whichever your child tolerates):** Spread the blanket on the floor and have your child lie down in the middle. With the help of another, pick up the corners and swing them side to side and/or lift them up and down slowly as well.
3. **Spinning:** Sometimes your child may seek out significant movement in order to feel calm. See attached spinning protocol if applicable to your child.
4. **Swinging in a regular swing or a tire swing**
5. **Use a Sit 'n' Spin**
6. **Rock in a rocking chair or rocking horse**
7. **Swing on a trapeze or monkey bars**
8. **Jump on a trampoline**
9. **Roll down a hallway or hill**
10. **Slide down a slide**
11. **Do somersaults**
12. **Roll inside a box or large tube**
13. **Lying on a therapy ball and spinning around**
14. **Running**

Providing Proprioception (Heavy Work) in the home:

1. If your child seeks pressure, have them lie on their back on the floor and roll a ball on top of them, providing pressure by pressing down and having them push back on the ball.
2. Play tug-of-war with a rope or sheet
3. Carrying heavy things like groceries or helping with laundry
4. Pulling heavy things in a wagon
5. Pushing a heavy box across the floor
6. Falling or jumping into a pile of pillows
7. Playing push-o-war with a large ball
8. Swimming
9. Pulling a sled up a hill
10. Crab walking
11. Bear crawling
12. Karate moves
13. Taking out the garbage
14. Vacuuming
15. Digging in the garden
16. Helping to mop the floor
17. Lifting weights
18. Walking up stairs taking two steps at a time
19. Jumping from the third step
20. Climbing a rope
21. Doing somersaults on a mat
22. Hanging upside down over the edge of the sofa and putting pressure into head and hands
23. Doing headstands next to the wall
24. Having a pillow fight
25. Pushing on a wall to try to “move” it or wall push-ups

Spinning Protocol

This protocol helps to optimally stimulate and organize the vestibular system through the three positions listed in this protocol.

During this activity, always monitor the reaction of your child carefully. If at any time, they begin to show signs of nausea (pale, no smile), do not continue. Talk with your occupational therapist about your child's reaction.

This activity can be completed on a flat swing, a large swivel chair, a saucer sled or a spin board. On any of these, the positions are the same.

1. Have your child sit with their legs crossed in front of them, and head tipped forward approximately 30 degrees. Spin them clockwise 10 times. Watch carefully in case they begin to fall off. Check for dizziness by watching for rapid eye movement once stationary; wait a few moments, and spin them counter clockwise 10 times.
2. Have your child lie down on their right side with their legs and arms curled up. Spin them, with their head moving forward, 10 times. Check for dizziness; wait a few moments, and then spin them, with their head moving backward, 10 times.
3. Have your child lie down on their left side with their legs and arms curled up. Spin them, with their head moving forward, 10 times. Check for dizziness; wait a few moments, and then spin them, with their head moving backward, 10 times.

If your child cannot tolerate 10 rotations both directions, forward and backward in each position, reduce to 5 rotations and watch for their reactions.

You can modify this activity for younger children by holding them firmly in your arms, with their legs wrapped around your waist, and spin them around two or three times in both directions. As your child's sensory system begins to modulate with this activity and they become more calm with increased attention span, you can reduce the frequency of this activity to one time per week or less, spinning only a few times in each position.

Jan Martin, OTR (12/09)
Sonja Lewis, OTR (3/20)

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