

Search older archives

CONTACT US[Print this page](#)[E-mail a friend](#)[Archives](#) » [2007-08](#) » [April stories](#)**Sensory treatment yields promising results for children with autism**

Friday, April 25, 2008

Parents of children with autism are increasingly turning to sensory integration treatment to help their children deal with the disorder, and they're seeing good results. In 2007, 71 percent of parents who pursued alternatives to traditional treatment used sensory integration methods, and 91 percent found these methods helpful.

A new study from Temple University researchers, presented this month at the American Occupational Therapy Association's 2008 conference, found that children with autistic spectrum disorders who underwent sensory integration therapy exhibited fewer autistic mannerisms compared to children who received standard treatments. Such mannerisms, including repetitive hand movements or actions, making noises, jumping or having highly restricted interests, often interfere with paying attention and learning.

The children assigned to the sensory integration intervention group also reached more goals specified by their parents and therapists, said study authors Beth Pfeiffer, Ph.D., OTR/L, BCP, and Moya Kinnealey, Ph.D., OTR/L, from the Occupational Therapy Department in Temple University's College of Health Professions. The children made progress toward goals in the areas of sensory processing/regulation, social-emotional and functional motor tasks.

Sensory integration is the ability of the brain to properly integrate and adapt to the onslaught of information coming in through the senses. Dysfunction in this area makes it difficult for people with autism to adapt to and function like others in their environment. They may be hypersensitive to sound or touch, or unable to screen out distracting noise or clothing textures. Their response might be impulsive motor acts, making noises or running away.

Pfeiffer and Kinnealey are part of a group of researchers seeking to bring more scientific understanding to occupational therapy using a sensory integration approach.

"It's been heavily documented that children on the autistic spectrum have differences in the way they process sensory information and respond motorically," Pfeiffer said. "While more families are seeking out the sensory integration approach because of its positive results, more research is needed to scientifically establish its effectiveness."

The other presenter was Kristie Koenig, Ph.D., OTR/L, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University. Funding was provided by Autism Speaks, which is dedicated to funding global biomedical research into the causes, prevention, treatments, and cure for autism and raising public awareness about autism and its effects on individuals, families, and society.