FAQ about Sensory Diets: Schedule of Input

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A sensory diet is an individualized plan that is designed to meet sensory needs in order to function optimally. This means maintaining attention and arousal for daily tasks and having adaptive responses, both emotionally and physically. Each individual has different sensory needs. Implementing a sensory diet is a sensory strategy often used in schools and homes to allow individuals to improve their processing and to improve interactions within daily tasks.

When creating a sensory diet, occupational therapists (OTs) should be a part of the process. OTs are trained to be able to assess and treat sensory processing and integration differences. OTs will assess individual systems and processing using evaluation tools, observations, and interviews. Implementing a sensory diet requires the preparation of activities and consistent monitoring and data collection to adjust for responses. Remember that the goal is for an individual to respond adaptively, which means being able to successfully meet the demands of tasks and activities within the current setting or environment.

FAQ #2: Is it okay to provide sensory input on a set schedule every day?
A: Because the purpose of a sensory diet is to meet the needs an individual has and those needs change daily, it is best to provide opportunities for sensory input both consistently and as needed. Individuals benefit from a combination of consistent sensory input and from the opportunity to meet needs as they arise.

When providing a sensory diet, it is important to use embedded activities that are designed to help individuals develop an adaptive neurological response to input. This may mean preparing for specific activities, adapting some activities, and increasing or decreasing sensory input for each system and setting. Following a set schedule can be helpful, however sensory needs may arise outside of the scheduled times. If an individual is focused and on-task, it is counterproductive to interrupt a functional task and provide sensory input. On the other hand, an individual who is demonstrating sensory-seeking behaviors or modulation difficulties may benefit from an unscheduled sensory break in order to continue activities that are scheduled. Sensory diets require observation and flexibility from the provider or caregiver.

For more strategies and ideas, check out IRCA sensory articles online or visit us at http://www.pinterest.com/IRCAIU/.