FAQ about Sensory Diets: Duration 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 #1: How long does sensory input last?
A: When reviewing literature and professional discussions about the duration of sensory input with occupational therapy, it becomes clear that there are not currently any specific answers about exactly how long sensory input lasts. Gwen Wild, of Sensational Brain LLC, shared one rule of thumb most therapists use that is based on exercise physiology research: begin with 10 minutes of moderate or high intensity input every two hours and monitor based on an individual’s needs and responses.

When providing intense sensory input, use the most caution when incorporating vestibular input, such as spinning or swinging. Provide vestibular input under the supervision of an occupational therapist.

For input duration related to vests and wearing schedules, research does not indicate a clear effect based on weight or schedule; however, previous protocols suggest weighted vests are most effective when worn for 2 hours on and off. Protocols for pressure vests indicate that they can be worn throughout the day.

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