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 #6 Is it sensory or behavior?
A: One of the most common questions asked when dealing with challenging behaviors is whether a particular behavior is a sensory issue or simply a behavior issue. Sensory issues can be an antecedent to behavior or a function of a behavior. Understanding an individual’s sensory needs and that meeting sensory needs or avoiding sensory input can often be a function of behavior can help guide the problem solving process. Observing the behaviors and what occurs before and after the behavior can help guide the process of analyzing behavior.

Evaluating and assessing sensory needs can also provide valuable data and information. Consider sensory needs when looking at underlying issues, setting events, and functions of behavior and consult with an occupational therapist and behavior specialist to determine strategies and develop a plan for addressing challenging behaviors. Understand that individuals have sensory needs that may impact behavior and that not all behavior is related to sensory needs. Incorporation of sensory diets and activities, behavior plans, and evidence-based strategies allow individuals to maximize their success at school and at home.

Sensory issues and behavior issues often overlap. According to Jean Ayres, “When the functions of the brain are whole and balanced body movements are highly adaptive, learning is easy, and good behavior is a natural outcome.”

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