



Sensory Integration therapy is classified as a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapy, as, while it is *highly* popular, it has not been scientifically proven to provide benefit. Due to its popularity – and despite a lack of a sufficient body of evidence to demonstrate its efficacy – many occupational therapy programs offer Sensory Integration Therapy as part of their rehabilitation programs. Occupational therapists are urged to inform parents of the limited and inconclusive evidence of SIT effectiveness, and to discuss the limitations of the therapy. Trial runs of sensory integration therapy are permissible, but should not constitute the whole of any treatment regimen – rather it should be part of a larger, evidence-based therapeutic program.

The premise of sensory integration therapy is that certain children are either overstimulated or understimulated by certain sensory inputs (such as certain textures, tastes or sounds), or have sensory stimulus-seeking behaviors. Sensory Integration Therapy (SIT) operates under the premise that children with [sensory processing difficulties](#) must have therapy in order to ‘reorganize’ their senses and process miscues in the brain to enable proper sensory responses. Because it is unclear whether such limitations stem from a separate disorder or are a hallmark of other developmental and behavioral disorders (such as neurological dysfunction, autism spectrum disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, developmental coordination disorders, and childhood anxiety disorders), ‘sensory processing disorder’ is not a diagnosis that many pediatrician recognize. Signs some individuals believe are signs of sensory processing disorder include:

- Aversions to specific textures, foods, or noises
- Over- or under-sensitivity to touch or their surroundings
- Restlessness or discomfort from sitting or standing
- Behavioral difficulties and/or inappropriate physical responses to stimuli
- Very high or low levels of physical activity
- Reclusiveness and/or low self-esteem
- Coordination difficulties
- Speech delays
- Trouble linking a task with the motions needed to complete it



Sensory integration therapy is practiced primarily with infants or very young children.

What Is Sensory Integration Therapy?

Sensory Integration Therapy was developed by Dr. Jean Ayers, Ph.D., who implemented a therapeutic program involving highly varied sensory inputs to help children 'get used to' certain stimuli, allowing them to adapt and react to their environment. The therapy begins with an evaluation of the children's current sensitivities to their environment, using parental interviews, health history,



testing and clinical observation as a basis for treatment plan development. After this initial screening, the therapist gives the child certain activities to perform in order to encourage organized responses to sensory input. This repetitive process (disguised as a fun activity) is meant to help the child learn self-regulation and become comfortable with certain sensory inputs.

While the process focuses on the traditional five senses (vision, hearing, smell, touch and taste), therapists also focus on vestibular processing (the information that helps a child balance and stand against gravity), and proprioception (information that helps with understanding a person's relation to the physical space around them).



What Does Sensory Integration Therapy Seek To Do?

Proponents of sensory integration therapy state that the modality provides concrete benefits in the following areas:

- Increasing hand-eye coordination and motor planning skills
- Improving posture, gait and balance
- Improved language acquisition
- Increased socialization, confidence, attentiveness and emotional regulation and well-being
- Decreased moodiness, restlessness, fear, frustration and inappropriate emotional display
- Improve physical and [cognitive function](#), improve learning capacity

Where Can I Find Sensory Integration Therapy Services?

Sensory integration therapy services are provided in schools, outpatient offices, inpatient rehabilitation clinics, hospitals, skilled nursing centers, and can sometimes be provided in an in-home visit setting. Typically, these services are provided by occupational therapists, although specialized SIT specialists do exist. In many cases, availability is limited because insurance companies do not always cover complementary and alternative therapies.



Learn More About Sensory Integration Therapy:

- [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\): Sensory Integration Therapies for Children With Developmental and Behavioral Disorders](#)
- [AAP: What is Sensory Integration Therapy?](#)
- [Aetna: Sensory Integration Therapy](#)
- [Sensory Integration Therapy in the News](#)